

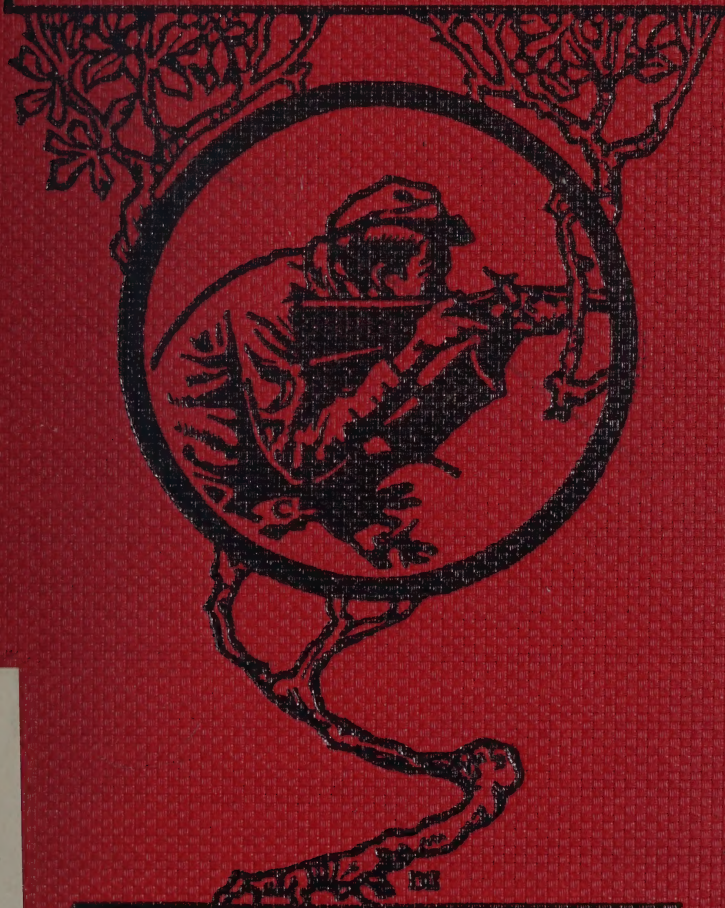
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PRISONERS OF WAR



By EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

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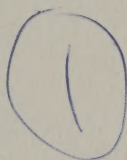


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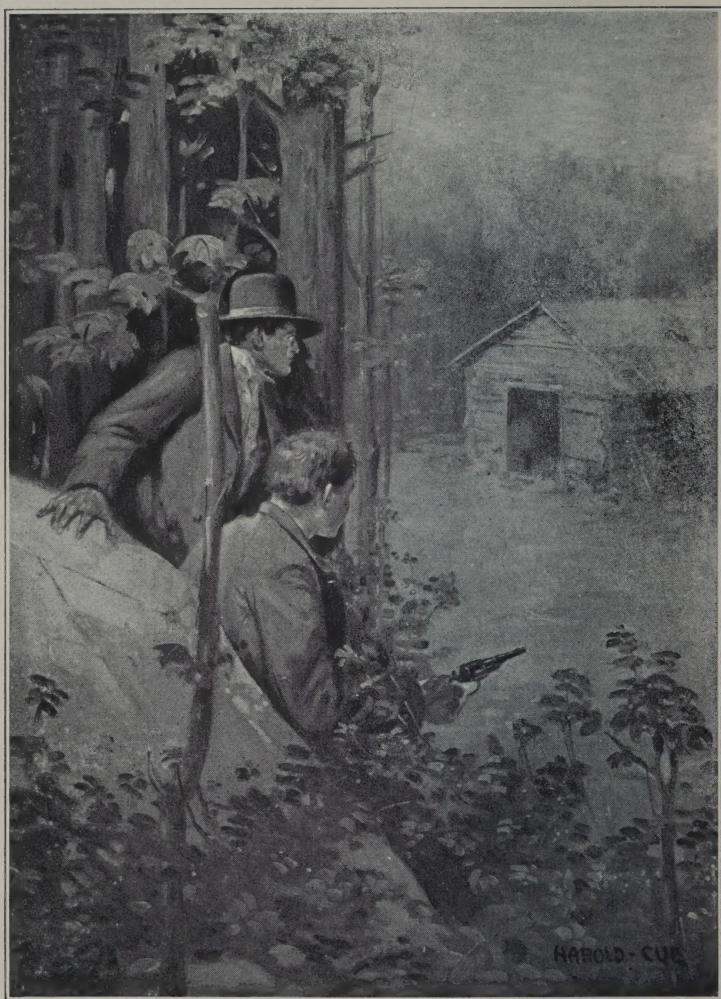
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PRISONERS OF WAR



"LISTEN," WHISPERED DENNIS

PRISONERS OF WAR

A Story of Andersonville

BY

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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PREFACE

NEARLY every incident incorporated in this story is based upon fact. I have made free use of letters which have been given me and have had many stories of personal experiences related by the unfortunate inmates of Andersonville.

Although free use has been made of standard histories, the writer wishes to acknowledge his special indebtedness to the following works; — *Famous Adventures and Escapes in the Civil War*, by various authors; *Sketches of the War*, and *Sketches in Prison Camps*, by Nott; *A Soldier's Story of Captivity at Andersonville*, by Goss; *Soldier Life*, by McCarthy; *Scenes in Georgia*, by Jones; and *Andersonville*, by John McElroy.

There is, of course, a marked difference between glorifying war and recording the facts. Whatever may be our feeling toward war itself, there are certain facts which every one ought to know. Perhaps more complete information will aid in avoiding causes of other possible conflicts.

The writer has done his utmost to avoid the feeling of bitterness which not unnaturally existed fifty years ago between the contending States. The heroism of the contestants, however, is a part of the common heritage of all young Americans. Knowledge of the bravery of their ancestors assuredly will not create in the minds of the boys and girls of to-day a decreased respect for those who fought the great battles of the Civil War.

Through this story it is hoped its young readers may become interested in a more complete understanding of the history of our common country and that their reading may include the more complete records of the great struggle.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY.

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PRISONERS OF WAR

CHAPTER I

A SECRET EXPEDITION

"BOTH you boys are wanted for a sacrit sarvice."

"What? What do you mean?" asked Noel Curtis sharply, who, with his brother Frank, was seated in his tent. The boys were twin brothers. They were enrolled in the ——th New York Regiment, and for more than a year had been serving in the Army of the Potomac, which in 1864, the time when this story begins, was fighting in Virginia.

"Indade, and 't is true."

"Who want us?"

"'T is Captain Mitchel told me to whisper th' sacrit to ye."

"And you do not know what the service is to be?" inquired Frank Curtis.

"'T is said to be a dangerous bit o' work," replied Dennis O'Hara, or Sergeant Dennis O'Hara, as he now was commonly called.

"Will both you boys join the party? No one is compelled to go ag'inst his will, but the captain says that up to th' prisent time no one has declined th' invitation."

"When is it to start?" inquired Noel.

"That I cannot say," answered Dennis. "I'm tellin' ye just what Captain Mitchel told me."

"Do you know how many men are to be chosen?" inquired Frank.

"About twinty."

"But you don't know when we are to go, nor where. You don't even know what it is for, and yet you want us to tell you offhand whether or not we will be ready to join."

"That's it, exactly," laughed Dennis. "'T is strange how Frank Curtis can put into his words what I had in me own mind. What shall I tell the captain?"

"Did he tell you to invite us to join?"

"He did that."

"You are sure you did not suggest to him to ask us?"

"That would n't make a bit o' difference," laughed Dennis. "'T is all th' same. There ye are, the captain wants to know whether or not he can put down your names."

The twin brothers looked seriously, each into the face of the other. Already they had shared in the terrible experiences of several battles in the great Civil War, which then was raging. Reluctantly their father, not long after the outbreak of hostilities, had given his consent for his two sons to enlist on their eighteenth birthday. As the war continued, however, in spite of the loneliness in the home on the shores of the far-away St. Lawrence River, the eagerness of both the father and mother of the boys for them to continue in the service had increased with every passing month.

The struggle between the two groups of States had now become so severe that the outcome was to be gained only by a decisive victory of one army over its opponent.

Thus far many things had combined to make the hearts of the friends of the Union somewhat heavy. Certain successes in the West and in the extreme South had been gained, but the failure of McClellan's campaign in the Peninsula, the indecisive result of the battle of Antietam, — although by it Lee had been turned back into Virginia, — the changes made in the commanding offi-

cers, as well as the unpreparedness of the Union troops at the outbreak of hostilities, had combined to make plain the fact that if final victory was to be won by the men from the North, it would be only after a long and bloody conflict.

The twin brothers, Noel and Frank Curtis, were both sharpshooters. The skill which in their early boyhood they had acquired in their hunting expeditions among the islands of the St. Lawrence had made them so efficient with their rifles that soon after their enlistment both boys were given tasks that were perilous. They had, however, acquitted themselves well, and, in spite of the fact that one of them had been severely wounded, they were both now among the more seasoned troopers.

"I will be after tellin' Captain Mitchel that he can count upon both you boys?" said Dennis, convinced that the conversation was almost ended.

Again the twin brothers glanced at each other and then Frank said, "Yes, we shall have to trust Captain Mitchel. I hope, however, that he will know more about what he wants us to do than the messenger he has

sent to invite us to become members of his little party."

Sergeant Dennis O'Hara said no more, but his face was beaming, as he abruptly turned away. Both his hearers were aware that he was eager to report to the captain that he had obtained the consent of the two young sharpshooters to do their share in the somewhat vague project which had been presented to them.

The young soldiers watched the departing sergeant until he could no longer be seen and then Frank Curtis said to his brother, "I was in Captain Mitchel's quarters a little while ago. While I was there a man was brought in who had been arrested as a spy. I watched the captain when the prisoner was left with him and I am sure of one thing."

"What's that?" inquired Noel.

"That Captain Mitchel knows the man and that if he is a spy, he is working for us and not against us."

"Do you think that man, if he is a spy, has anything to do with this scheme that Dennis has told us about?"

"I did n't know that Dennis told us about any scheme," laughed Frank. "All he wanted

of us was our promise to join a band that is to be selected for some secret service."

"He said it was a dangerous service, too," suggested Noel.

"So he did," acknowledged Frank, "and probably there is n't any question as to that. We shall know more about it later, if there is anything more to be done."

Only a brief time elapsed before Sergeant Dennis O'Hara again entered the tent of the brothers, saying, "'T is mighty glad Captain Mitchel is that you will go."

"Did he tell you when we are to start?" asked Noel.

"You are to start at once for his quarters," replied Dennis.

"All right," said Noel promptly, rising as he spoke. "Then the longer we wait here the less we shall know about what is wanted of us."

A brief time afterward the young sharpshooters were admitted into the quarters of Captain Mitchel and were listening eagerly to what that young officer was telling them.

"I cannot explain to you," continued the captain, "all the details, but you must un-

derstand that there is danger connected with the enterprise. A selection of men whom we know thoroughly has been made, and thus far not one has declined to go."

"How many are going?" inquired Frank quietly. "Dennis — I mean the sergeant — said there were twenty."

"That is correct. What is wanted of you now, if you consent, —" he added, hesitating a moment for the boys to reply.

"We are both willing to go into anything, Captain Mitchel, that you think must be done and that we can do," said Noel slowly.

"Very good. Then you are to come to my quarters to-night, or late this afternoon. You will be dressed as Southerners. You will carry no arms except your revolvers."

Both boys were staring at the young officer, who was himself plainly impressed by the importance of the project, which as yet was vague in the minds of both his hearers.

It was evident to the young sharpshooters that even if the young captain was aware of further details he was not inclined to explain more at the present time. However, his quiet, unassuming manner, as well as his un-

questioned bravery, already had made Captain Mitchel a hero in the minds of his men.

"May I ask, Captain Mitchel," inquired Noel, "if you are to go with us?"

The captain shook his head, but did not otherwise reply, and the boys at once saluted and departed from his tent.

It was not long before sunset when the little band of twenty men, following a leader whom apparently no one knew, set forth from the camp.

Noel and Frank Curtis found among the number several men whom they had previously met, but Sergeant Dennis O'Hara was the only one with whom they were personally acquainted.

The leader of the band was a stranger to all. Even his name was unknown. When the young sharpshooters looked interestedly at him, they saw that he was a vigorous, active man, quiet in his bearing and manifestly possessed of great physical strength. The breadth of his shoulders seemed to be out of all proportion to his height and caused him to present an appearance of being shorter than in reality he was.

The quiet air of authority with which he

assumed the leadership at once obtained for him the confidence of his followers. Steadily he led the way beyond the camp until the little band had advanced about a mile outside the outer guards.

A word from the leader, spoken in so low a voice that neither of the brothers was able to hear what was said, caused the band to withdraw from the road and enter the nearby woods.

When the party had advanced a distance sufficient to prevent their voices from being overheard by any chance passer-by, the leader halted and in the dim light faced the quiet and interested score of men.

"I think you men have the right ring," began the leader quietly. "You have followed me without knowing who I am, or into what I am taking you. I am now ready to explain what it is that I want."

A brief silence followed his words and then he continued: "I shall not tell you who I am. It will be sufficient for a time for you to call me Captain Jack. Let me tell you, however, that I have been in the war from its beginning, and, if I live, I intend to stay in until the last gun is fired. I came

back to camp this morning and have obtained permission to take twenty men with me and go into the enemy's country."

"How far are we goin'?" inquired Dennis O'Hara.

"That will depend very much upon what success attends our efforts. I am hopeful we shall not go more than one or two hundred miles. We shall make our way across the country and begin our work at a place, the name of which I shall not now speak aloud. I have it written on paper and also have had ten maps drawn of the roads of all the adjacent country. I shall give one of these papers to every two men. You will be divided into little detachments of three or four each. You are to go first to the east and then to the south until every one is well inside the Confederate lines. On the evening of the third day after we start we are to meet at the hotel in the place the name of which I have written on your paper."

"And are we going right into the country of the Johnnies?" inquired Dennis, who apparently was the only one of the party that ventured to question the leader.

"We certainly are. After we meet, I am

planning to capture a train, or a part of a train, and run away with it and burn all the bridges we are able to set on fire along the railroad behind us."

"That's the way to talk!" broke in Dennis excitedly, although it was manifest now that his companions were almost as greatly aroused as he.

"I have some money here for every one, so that after we separate and begin to work our way to the south, you may go as far as you can make your way as passengers on such trains as may be running. The chief thing just now is for you all to keep in mind that every one must be at the place appointed for our meeting and that he must not be a minute late in arriving."

CHAPTER II

ON THE WAY

FOR an hour the men remained with their leader, who meanwhile answered the questions which were frequently and eagerly asked, and then added a few clear directions to those which he previously had given.

Quickly, arrangements were made for dividing the little company into detachments of three. By this plan Dennis and the two Curtis boys were placed in one group. Money was given to every man, and papers containing maps of the roads and also the name of the place and the hotel at which the men were to assemble on the third day were distributed. In the pockets of every one were two or three pieces of hard-tack, which would serve for food if they were unable to obtain any provisions in the country through which they should pass.

When these arrangements had been made, the band quickly separated, each detachment moving swiftly and silently from the woods.

When the turn came for Dennis and his companions to start for the meeting-place, the leader, who still was known only as Captain Jack, stopped the three boys a moment as he said, "If you 'll take my advice, you will go in the opposite direction. You look as if you might be able to follow a path through the woods even in the night. If you can do that, you will find yourselves much nearer a station and there is a train supposed to leave about four o'clock in the morning."

Thanking the man for his suggestion, the boys at once turned into the woods, the light being sufficient to enable them to follow the outlines of the winding pathway.

Whether this path was worn by people of the region or was a cattle trail, they were unable to determine. They were confident, however, in the directions which had been given them and without hesitation entered upon their task.

Sooner than they had expected they arrived at the border of the wooded tract and there all three halted.

"We are to turn to our left on this road," said Frank, to whom the written directions

had been given. "I cannot see in this light whether there are any branches to the road which would be likely to make us lose our way."

"Wait until we come to the branches," insisted Dennis. "'T is a good thing niver to cross a bridge until ye come to it."

"That's a good suggestion," laughed Frank, as he thrust the paper back into his pocket, and the trio at once resumed their journey.

Not many houses were to be seen along the road, and only once were they compelled to stop by an alarm. A dog, which they suspected belonged in one of the negro cabins, raised a cry at the passing of the young soldiers. In alarm, all three stopped a brief time to enable them to discover whether or not the noise had increased their peril. In spite of the furious barking, no one appeared, and speedily the boys resumed their way.

It was now late in April. The air already was fragrant with the odor of green leaves and early opening flowers.

As the light increased above the horizon, Noel said, "I think the station is right ahead of us." As he spoke he pointed to a

little settlement consisting of only a few houses. It was the nearest approach to a village, however, that they had seen since they had left their companions early the preceding evening.

Noel's prophecy proved to be correct, and in a brief time the three boys arrived at the little station. The agent, an aged and apparently decrepit individual, was asleep on a rude bench in what was designated as the "gentlemen's waiting-room." As one or two women were already seated in the place, leaning back against the wall and noisily proclaiming the fact that they were oblivious of their surroundings, just why the name had been applied to the room none of the young soldiers understood. Even their arrival did not arouse any interest in the waiting people or in the agent.

A rattle of the window of the little apartment in which tickets were sold at last aroused the old man from his slumbers, and sitting quickly erect he demanded, "Who's that? W'at fo' yo' all make that noise?"

"We want tickets."

Groaning as if the task of guiding his outworn body to the window was almost be-

yond his power, the agent arose and stumbled toward the door. Entering the room, he raised the ticket window, inquiring as he did so, "Whar' yo' all want tickets fo'?"

"I want a ticket to Jordan," responded Dennis promptly.

The ticket was slowly pushed toward him, but not until the agent was aware that the money was in the hands of his purchaser. Fortunately no change was required, and then Frank and Noel quickly purchased tickets for a station beyond that for which Dennis had inquired.

It was not deemed wise for all three boys to buy tickets for the same destination. They planned also, if they succeeded in entering the train without trouble, to take seats in different cars. In this way they were hopeful that the conductor or passengers would not suspect that they were acquainted with one another, or were members of the same party.

Before the coming of the train for which they were waiting, however, the boys were surprised when two long trains filled with sleeping soldiers passed the station, both coming from the north. The arrival of these

trains intimated plainly a delay in the coming of the train for which the boys were waiting. With the approach of the morning it would be more difficult for them to conceal their identity and pass, as they were striving to do, as young men from the South.

However, the longed-for train appeared much sooner than they had expected, and, after a brief stop, resumed its journey, carrying among its passengers the three young soldiers.

Frank and Noel obtained seats one behind the other in the front car. They had insisted upon their companion finding a place in the car in the rear. As the remarks which Dennis was likely to make at any time were to be feared by his friends as well as by his enemies, a proper regard for their safety caused the boys to suggest to the light-hearted Irishman the plan which was adopted.

A few minutes after the departure of the train, Noel leaned back to whisper to his brother, "Do you see those three men ahead of us? They are in the second and third seats on the right."

Thus bidden, Frank glanced in the direc-

tion indicated by his brother, and then replied, "Yes. They are our men. I wonder how they happened to catch this train. They started in the opposite direction when they left the woods."

"I do not know," replied Noel, "but I am sorry they are here."

The words had barely been spoken before the door of the car was opened and the conductor, followed by four men who were clad in the Confederate gray, entered. All four were officers and without delay at once approached the seats in which the three members of the band to which Noel and Frank belonged were sitting.

Excited as the two young sharpshooters were, they were unable to hear what was said. It was manifest, however, that trouble of some kind had arisen, for the three Northern men were protesting vigorously against the demands which plainly were made of them.

In the midst of the interview the speed of the train slackened, and as Noel glanced out of the window, he saw that they were approaching a rude little station. His interest, however, was so keen in the results of the

interview between the Confederate officers and the men to whom they were talking that he gave slight heed to conditions outside.

His alarm was increased when, at a word from one of the officers, the three men arose and followed the four officers as they led the way to the platform of the car.

After the lumbering train halted, Noel and Frank saw from their windows their three recent companions standing with the officers on the platform of the station.

Hastily the two boys drew back from the side of the car, fearful that they also might be summoned to join the group outside. It seemed to the anxious young soldiers as if the screech of the locomotive announcing the departure of the train would not be heard. Again and again they glanced at the door at each end of the car, fearful that other Confederate officers might enter and repeat the demands which had been made upon the three men.

Doing their utmost to appear indifferent and barely responding to the courteous salutations of some of their near-by traveling companions, they drew their slouch

hats part-way over their faces, pretending to be asleep.

At last the prolonged screech of the locomotive was heard and after several attempts the train once more was under motion.

Even then the alarm of the boys had not entirely left them. The conductor once more passed through the car, but this time he was unattended. He did not speak to either of the brothers and apparently entertained no suspicions that they were other than what they appeared to be.

"That was a close call," whispered Frank to his brother.

"It certainly was," responded Noel fervently. "Even now I do not know that we are safe."

"I know those three men are not safe," said Frank vigorously. "I wonder how those officers found out they were on the train."

"I don't know any more about it than you do," responded Noel. "My great hope is that they do not know we are on board. I never felt before in my life that I was of so much importance as I do right now."

Frank laughed as he said in a low voice, "It won't do for us to appear to be having much to do with each other, but I wish I knew what those three fellows have to face. It is a serious matter to be caught behind the lines of the enemy when one is dressed in citizens' clothing."

"I don't know that I call this exactly a citizen's clothing," said Noel demurely, as he glanced at his ill-fitting garments, "but it will have to answer for a time. Now we won't say anything more until we arrive at Jordan, where we leave this train and take another."

Without any further adventures the two young soldiers arrived at Jordan where they were to change cars.

There was a wait of an hour or more, before the arrival of the train they were planning to take. Throughout that time the boys did not speak to each other, even when they both made their way to a little country store near the station and obtained some scanty provisions which dulled, without satisfying, their appetites.

The experience of the morning caused them to enter different cars when the ap-

proaching train finally halted at the station.

A further ride of three hours was interrupted frequently, because the train was compelled to take a side track to enable other trains, filled with soldiers, to pass.

The sight of these train-loads of men was somewhat depressing. It was plain that reinforcements were being hastened to the support of Lee's army. Where the men were coming from or to what division they belonged, it was impossible for either of the boys to decide.

However, neither boy had been molested when at last, late in the afternoon, they arrived at the place where they were to leave the train.

Dennis now joined them openly and together they started rapidly along the sandy road which was plainly indicated on the map that Frank carried. The presence of the three strangers evidently was somewhat puzzling to the few people who were seen on the streets of the little hamlet, but no questions were asked and the boys were not molested.

About five o'clock they stopped at a house

not far back from the roadway. The place appeared to be well kept and all three boys were hopeful that here they might obtain supper and perhaps an opportunity to rest for a few hours.

Upon their arrival they found no one about the little plantation except women and negroes. In response to their request they were given food, for which all their offers of money were refused. Free permission also was given for them to enter the house and rest as long as they might desire.

While Noel and Dennis, after the invitation had been accepted, were sleeping, Frank remained awake. It was necessary for some one to be on guard and he had quickly declared that the privilege was to be his. When another stop should be made, then he would obtain the rest he required and one of his companions might serve as guard, he explained.

At midnight the three boys quietly departed from the house, leaving behind them upon the table in the room in which they had slept a substantial return for the hospitality which so freely had been given them.

Steadily pursuing their way, about four

o'clock in the morning they arrived on the border of a stream thirty or more feet wide.

"The bridge is down!" exclaimed Frank, in astonishment, when the trio stopped near the shore. "It must have been torn down recently, for there is a bridge shown here on my map."

All three looked carefully at the paper which Frank was examining and were convinced that they had made no mistake in their route. The road was plainly shown on the paper and a bridge was marked at the place where now they had stopped, but the bridge itself no longer was there.

"And what shall we do?" demanded Dennis.

"Look there!" said Frank quickly, calling the attention of his two companions, as he spoke, to a pile of logs and slabs near by. "Why can't we make a raft?"

"You have forgotten," suggested Noel, "that nails and hammers, to say nothing of saws or bolts, are just as necessary as lumber."

"We'll look through that old mill, yonder," said Frank pointing to a structure not far away that at one time might have been

a mill, as he suggested. "It does n't look as if anything was there now, or had been for a long time. Still, we may be able to find something which will help us."

CHAPTER III

THE PLACE OF MEETING

A SEARCH of the premises revealed an old dugout or canoe which had been formed from a cypress log.

"That's what we want," exclaimed Noel gleefully, when he made his discovery.

"It's all right," responded Frank, "but it won't carry more than one. How are we to get it back here for the next fellow?"

"There may be a rope somewhere around here," suggested Noel.

A thorough search was at once undertaken, but no rope or other means by which the dugout could be drawn back for another voyage was found.

"I have it," exclaimed Frank when the three soldiers passed out of the mill and walked along the shore. "Here's a grapevine. We'll cut or break that, and I'm sure we can get a strip as long as the distance between the banks."

In a brief time the grapevine was secured, a sapling was cut to serve as a pole, and

Noel, who was to make the first attempt, boarded the old and somewhat decayed dugout.

It was not a new experience for him to handle a difficult craft, trained as he had been on the shores of the distant St. Lawrence. Cautiously and safely he made his way to the opposite bank, trailing the grapevine behind him.

The dugout was then drawn back to the place where Dennis and Frank were awaiting it, and the latter stepped quickly on board and successfully made the crossing.

It was the turn of Dennis next to pull back the unwieldy craft. When he stepped on board, a low call from Noel advised him of his peril. "Be careful, Dennis," warned the young soldier. "You may split the dugout or tip it over. I think the mud in the bottom of this creek must be two feet deep. If you are spilled out and caught there, no one knows whether you will ever get free again or not."

"Don't lie awake for me," retorted Dennis.

The young Irishman confidently grasped his pole and pushed his boat out into the

sluggish stream. As he thrust out into the water he became silent. The experience was entirely new to him and his skill manifestly was not great. Both boys were interested spectators and frequently offered suggestions to their companion.

Dennis, however, was strangely silent. When he arrived at mid-stream his presence of mind apparently forsook him. The treacherous little craft began to roll violently and a moment later the unfortunate young Irish soldier was struggling in the muddy water.

As he was unable to swim, his frantic calls for help were so agonizing that neither Noel nor Frank laughed at his predicament, although neither believed there was any real danger for Dennis, who was about twelve feet distant from the bank on which they were standing. The water, discolored and muddy, took on a deeper tinge as Dennis struggled desperately to gain a foothold. The water itself did not come above his waist, but the bottom of the stream was soft and the very intensity of Dennis's efforts deprived him of ability to assist himself.

Seizing a pole, which he discovered on the

bank, Noel hastily tossed it to his luckless friend. In desperation Dennis grasped the end of the pole, but the combined efforts of both Frank and Noel were required before the mud-stained, dripping, woe-begone Dennis was drawn safely to the bank.

"And will ye look at me!" exclaimed Dennis ruefully, as he glanced at his dripping garments.

"Never mind that," laughed Frank. "Let me take your revolver. I want to keep that dry. That may be more useful to us than dry clothes."

With many exclamations of disgust Dennis handed him the weapon, and while Frank was busy, trying to dry and clean the revolver, Dennis was occupied in a similar task with his clothing.

"Bedad," said Dennis, when at last his task was completed, "but we ought to take the dugout to the other side and lave it there. It was kind of the owner to give us the use of it, and we don't want to be impertinent."

"If you take it back, Dennis," laughed Frank, "how are you going to get over to this side of the bank again?"

"Sure, and I did n't think o' that," said Dennis, shaking his head. "I think we'll compromise the matter by lavin' the boat here and lettin' th' owner come and get it when he chooses. He ought to be thankful that we have n't taken the dugout with us. We're still lavin' it on the same creek where we found it."

Another long walk now confronted the young soldiers and all three were thoroughly wearied when at last they arrived at the little station which they were seeking. There they were compelled once more to await the arrival of a train, the scheduled time of which was indicated on the paper which Frank carried in his pocket.

They saw that the train, when at last it drew near, was composed of three cars. Only one of the boys entered any one car. A tedious ride was before them and it was not long before all three were sleeping soundly.

Before daylight they left the train at a small junction and there resumed their journey on foot across the country. They were less fortunate in finding a place where they might obtain breakfast, but some hoecake was cooked for them in a negro cabin, and

with this scanty food they were compelled to be content.

A walk of five miles soon brought them across the country to a little place where once more they were to board the cars.

The train there, however, was two hours behind the scheduled time, and the young soldiers were on the point of resuming their journey on foot when they heard the screech of the approaching locomotive.

Again they followed the plan they had before adopted of scattering so that no two of them were in the same car. The train was many times delayed and their progress consequently was slow.

As wood was used in the fires beneath the boiler, clouds of dark smoke, containing streaks of oily pitch, poured through the windows and filled the cars. The faces of all the travelers soon were in such a condition that it would have been difficult to distinguish a black man from a white. The boys, however, were more than content, convinced that because of the smoke they were more likely to escape attention from the unduly curious.

It was early in the morning when at last

they arrived at their destination. Going directly to the tavern, they were delighted to discover Captain Jack on the piazza.

Without appearing to recognize the new arrivals, the leader of the band motioned for one of them to step outside the building. Frank quickly obeyed the suggestion, leaving his companions to obtain a room, if possible.

When the leader and the young soldier had withdrawn to a place where they thought they were free from observation, Captain Jack said, "At least three of our men have been taken."

"Yes," said Frank, "they were on the train with us. How did you know?"

"Because there was still another one on the same train. He reported to me that he saw you also."

"How is it that he arrived here before we did?"

"I do not know. Probably he traveled a little more rapidly. One other man is missing," continued Captain Jack, "so that it looks as if sixteen would be all that could be depended upon for our expedition. Of one thing I am sure, however, and that is that we can depend upon every one that is here."

Frank did not respond, although he smiled as the leader spoke. He, too, was not afraid that the men now would hesitate or withdraw.

"No one about the village seems to be stirring," continued Captain Jack. "It will be safer for us to meet in my room now than it will be later."

"Which is your room?" inquired Frank.

"It is the one at the head of the stairway. Do not rap, just open the door and come in."

Leaving his leader, Frank now returned to the hotel and in the washroom succeeded in removing some of the traces of his recent experiences. He was not altogether successful in his efforts, but was somewhat more presentable when at last he mounted the stairway, and, opening the door of the room in the hall opposite, found himself in the presence of the assembled company.

The room was nearly filled and apparently the inmates were in high spirits.

"There are some things which I have found out," Captain Jack was saying. He was standing in one corner of the room, looking into the faces of the company. "Some of these things may trouble us. We

have found out that there are trains moving and most of them are crowded with Johnnies. Indeed, there are so many of the Confederates on some of the trains that they are mixed up with the passengers and you can't tell one from another. Then, too, I have learned that the place where we are to make our attempt to seize the locomotive has just been made into a Confederate camp. It was only a few days ago that this plan was decided upon. Now, if we are to carry out our plans, the first thing we shall have to do will be to ride on a train on which we are likely to be captured. If we are lucky enough to escape and reach the place we want, we shall find a large camp there filled with soldiers. If we take the locomotive, it will have to be right before the eyes of these soldiers."

"The game is n't worth the candle, Captain," called out one of the men. "There is n't one chance in a thousand that we can ever do it."

"What's the best thing to be done?" inquired the leader, as he looked directly into the face of the speaker.

"Better give up the whole undertaking," replied the man, shaking his head. "We can

try to get back to our companies, though I don't think the chances of success are very good."

"I am not going to back out of this," said Captain Jack quietly. "I don't want any one to come with me, though, if he feels as this man does. I am offering every one of you now the privilege of withdrawing if you want to take it."

The quiet leader, who was a man of medium size and without any mark to distinguish him from others in a crowd, calmly waited for a response to his suggestion.

One after another the men in the room declared that they shared in the determination of Captain Jack. They were ready to do their utmost to make the daring attempt a success.

"You are sure, are you," inquired the leader once more, "that you do not want to turn back?"

The expression on the faces of the men showed clearly that all now were determined to succeed or be taken in the attempt.

"Then I have just a few words more to say," continued the leader. "Go to the station separately and buy your tickets, but

do not buy them for the place where we are planning to get our locomotive. Buy them for some station beyond."

"But we don't know the names of the places," suggested Frank.

"You will find them posted on the timetable that is hanging on the wall in the station," responded the leader. "The train leaves at seven-thirty. Scatter through the train. Don't talk to one another and don't forget to get off when we pull in at Hamlet."

CHAPTER IV

THE STOLEN LOCOMOTIVE

IN spite of the excitement and anxiety of the men engaged in the perilous enterprise, all were quiet and apparently indifferent when they arrived at the station.

They had little to say to one another and were doing their utmost to pass as strangers. The fate which had already befallen several of their comrades was in the thoughts of every one. Soldiers were boarding the train and several cars already were completely filled with the men in gray.

Word had been quietly passed from one to another of the intrepid band that Hamlet was only a few miles away. Every one was told to maintain a quiet and keen lookout and leave the train as soon as it arrived.

When at last the heavy train pulled out of the station, Noel Curtis breathed a sigh of relief, for his anxiety apparently had been greater than that of his brother Frank, who was seated at the opposite end of the car.

A heavy mist that was almost like rain

had settled over the country. The outlook was gloomy, and even the trees that had put forth new leaves now seemed almost to be regretting their energy. There was a stickiness in the heavy atmosphere that made the smoke from the locomotive even more disagreeable than it had been the preceding day.

Neither of the Curtis boys had been able to obtain any breakfast. They were fearful that if they should eat the hard-tack, which still remained in their pockets, the act might bring them under the suspicions of some of their fellow-travelers. Their ride was supposed to be less than an hour in duration and a promise had been held out that some food might be obtained at Hamlet. Slowly the long train wound its way through the valleys. The hills, which were not high, were covered with mist. The monotony of the journey was unbroken.

When, however, the train drew alongside the station which was their destination, a thrill passed over Noel which was intensified when, looking from the window, he saw numberless rows of tents before him.

The report that a large encampment had

been made at the station was somewhat disconcerting. And there were many soldiers there, too, for the men already could be seen moving about the place. Some of them were approaching the station, plainly free to share in the excitement which naturally accompanied the arrival of new troops.

When Noel was aware of the numbers of the Confederates in the camp before him, success in the undertaking in which Captain Jack was leading his band seemed well-nigh impossible. For a moment he had visions of his distant home. At this time in the morning his father and mother and the "hired man" doubtless were already engaged in the tasks of the coming day. For a moment he closed his eyes and seemed to see the blue waters of the St. Lawrence, on the borders of which his father's farm was located.

Hastily deciding that his safety depended upon giving his entire attention to the immediate task that confronted him, Noel slowly arose from his seat and made his way to the platform.

Every member of the band had been told to watch Captain Jack without appearing to be doing so. When the leader should raise

his hand, that was to be the signal for the immediate rallying of his followers about him.

When at last the train was emptied, the crew, as well as the passengers, hastened to a counter which stood at one side of the dilapidated little station. On this counter were displayed various articles of food, that is, various in form, though the material of which they were composed was one. Corn bread, plainly, was not merely the staple article of diet in the region, but was also the main reliance of the enterprising man who presided at the counter.

It was soon manifest also that no guards had been stationed to watch the train, although not far from the place where the locomotive was noisily announcing its presence, a sentinel was to be seen. Slowly he was pacing back and forth, evidently without any suspicion of peril, and his interest plainly was centered in the crowd that had disembarked from the train.

Noel saw Captain Jack speak quietly to two men, whom he recognized as members of the band, and then the leader slowly worked his way toward the front of the

train. The two men soon followed him and it was not long before Noel was aware that all the members of the band were standing in different places about the outer end of the platform. The puffing engine still poured forth its clouds of sticky smoke that almost enveloped the few people nearby. There were times when even the sentinel could no longer be seen.

The Curtis brothers now were together once more, and Noel touched Frank quickly on his arm, as he saw Captain Jack and his two selected followers slowly walking by the side of the car. Striving desperately to repress the excitement which was almost overpowering him, Noel watched the two men when they stepped in between two box cars at the front of the train and uncoupled them. The sentinel was watching them curiously, but was apparently still unaware that there was anything unusual in their actions.

Returning from the space between the cars, the leader and his two followers then advanced quickly toward the locomotive. In front of the place where they had cut the train there were one box car, one baggage car, and the tender and the locomotive.

When the trio drew near the engine, the leader suddenly raised his hand and then with his two companions leaped on board the locomotive. His followers, still striving to move in such a manner as not to attract undue attention, at once advanced and opened the doors of the box car and also of the baggage car.

At that moment Noel saw that Captain Jack and his companions were on board the locomotive.

Instantly, the remaining members clambered into the box and baggage cars, the doors of which now stood open. In their zeal some aided their companions by lifting them bodily into the car. Still the sentinel was not alarmed, evidently viewing the actions of the men as a part of the duties of the trainmen.

In a brief time Captain Jack had thrown the valve wide open, and the hearts of his followers almost stood still in their excitement when the wheels of the engine slipped around and around without gripping the rails.

Suddenly the locomotive leaped forward and at the same moment the soldiers in the

box car were thrown against one another so violently that few were able to remain standing.

As the train bounded ahead, a wild cry arose from the camp. There were shots and shouts, and as Noel peered out of the open door, he saw a band of men running wildly in pursuit, calling and waving their hands as they advanced. The train by this time, however, was under full headway and not many minutes elapsed before the pursuers no longer could be seen.

"Whew!" whispered Noel, to his brother, "I hope we don't run into any train."

"I guess there is n't much danger of that. Captain Jack told me that he had a copy of the time-table which gives the running time of every train. I don't believe we'll have a collision, but if we do it will be as hard for the other fellows as it is for us."

"Does he know of any train we are likely to meet?"

"He said there was a train that we might meet two stations ahead. He heard at Hamlet that there was a local freight, pretty nearly due, not down on the time-table."

"What shall we do?"

“Why, run on to a side track, of course. You see we’ll take the schedule time of the train whose engine and baggage cars we have run away with. If we can once make about twenty-five miles, we can burn two bridges, so Captain Jack says. If we burn them down, then there won’t be anybody able to follow us.”

Through a broken panel in the rear of the car the inmates were able to see something of the country through which they were passing. The runaway train, however, had not gone more than three or four miles before it was stopped and at the urgent suggestion of the leader the men at once began their task. One division cut the telegraph wires. Another tore up the track, while the third was busily loading the box car with a pile of cross-ties which they found near by.

Soon after the journey was resumed, the fugitives came to a little station, where once more the train was halted. Through the broken panel the boys heard Captain Jack talking to the station agent.

“We have a train here loaded with powder,” he was explaining, “and we have got

to get through. We impressed a train back at Hamlet, and we do not want anything to hinder us on our way. We have simply got to be given leeway."

The coolness of the leader prevailed and even assistance was given him, while the tender was once more piled with wood and the boiler replenished with water.

Several miles more were covered before another stop was made. The men were without any implements to assist them, and it was with great difficulty that they succeeded in tearing a rail from the ties.

As soon as a single rail had been torn away, the flight was resumed. Swiftly darting through the little hamlets, roaring past the towns and stations, there came a feeling of exhilaration to the daring men. Danger undoubtedly there was, but there was also an inspiration in the thought that thus far, at least, they were making a swift run through the enemy's country.

Twenty miles were covered in this manner, but when they approached the little station, they discovered that a train had just arrived and was waiting there for the morning mail, which was supposed to be

brought by the train from which the daring boys had taken the locomotive.

The excitement of the men in the box car increased when they learned from the conversation which Captain Jack had with the agent that a freight train also was due within a few minutes.

"Then there's nothing for us to do," said the leader coolly, "except to take the side track and wait for it."

Impatiently, the men waited until at last a prolonged screech in the distance announced the approach of the looked-for train. Their chagrin, however, was great when they discovered a red flag flying from the locomotive, indicating that still another train was following it. Complications were increasing and the difficulty of passing the train in front of them was becoming greater every moment.

"What do you mean?" the boys heard Captain Jack loudly demand of the station agent. "What do you mean, sir? Why do you block our track this way when I have orders to take this powder through without a moment's delay?"

"We cannot help it, sir. We did not know

anything about this. We are doing the best we can for you, sir," replied the agent humbly.

There was nothing to be done except to wait for the coming of the extra train. At last, after what seemed a long time, the long freight train slowly approached the station.

The freight train was compelled to pull ahead, thus enabling the second train to follow it until the rear cars had passed the switch. Impatiently waiting for this to be done, as soon as the cars passed, Captain Jack gave orders for his train to proceed. An hour had been lost in the waiting.

During this time the leader had sent word to the men who were confined in the box car that they were supposed to be the "powder" he was carrying. He urged every man to be in readiness, so that if occasion required they could leap from the car and fight their way through to the open country beyond.

Meanwhile, a new peril had arisen from the direction in which the runaway train had come. The conductor of the train from which the locomotive had been separated,

and one of the skilled mechanics who chanced to be on board at the time, finding themselves without a locomotive, started swiftly on foot in the direction in which the runaways had fled.

They had not gone far before they discovered a hand car on a side track. Instantly taking possession of this and exerting themselves to the utmost of their strength, they resumed the pursuit. Twice the daring men were thrown into the ditch as their car struck the breaks which had been made in the rails.

Soon arriving at a station, they found there a locomotive ready for service, which they instantly seized. Volunteers joined them until the locomotive and its tender were filled with armed men, all eager to overtake the Yankees who were speeding before them.

CHAPTER V

A WILD FLIGHT

THE first intimation that came to the desperate soldiers that they were in immediate danger of pursuit was the prolonged scream of a locomotive, apparently not far behind them.

At the time, the men were desperately striving to tear a rail from its place on the roadbed. Tools with which to accomplish this task were lacking, and they had been compelled to use, with an iron bar, poles which they cut from the near-by woods. The rail which they were struggling to remove had been bent somewhat in their efforts, but as yet they had been unable to tear it from its place.

"What's that?" demanded Dennis, startled by the prolonged blast of the whistle.

"It is a train after us," said Captain Jack sharply. "Get aboard, every man of you!"

In their eagerness to obey the command, several men slipped and rolled down the

high embankment. Fearful that they might be abandoned by their comrades they called loudly upon them to await their return.

Eagerly the belated men were assisted by their friends to board the box car, and away sped the train, once more under a full head of steam.

At the next station they found a train composed of many freight cars, with a passenger car attached to the rear. Here the fugitives were compelled to halt and Captain Jack once more assumed his role as the conductor of a powder train, bound for the Confederate army.

"There is an express coming," explained the station agent.

"How soon is it due?" inquired the leader.

"It will be here in about forty minutes."

"And how far is it to the next station?"

"A little better than seven miles."

"We'll make it," said Captain Jack resolutely. Calling abruptly to his men, the mad flight was resumed.

Two miles from the station another halt was made, while the wires there were cut and an attempt was made to tear a rail from the sleepers. The attempt was only

partly successful, and, fearful every moment of the approach of their pursuers, the party speedily resumed their flight.

When they drew near the station, they all were startled by the screech of a locomotive not far before them.

"It is the express train," said Dennis. "'Tis just pulling out o' th' station."

His words were partly drowned by a prolonged and fierce blast from the whistle of their locomotive.

In response to this signal the express was soon seen pulling back toward the station from which it had departed when it had been signaled by the unexpected "powder train."

Aware that it would be impossible to pass on the main track, for the rear of the express was now covering the junction with the main track, the Yankee soldiers again were compelled to halt.

"This is the worst yet," whispered Noel to his brother, as they listened intently to the conversation which followed between their leader and the conductor of the train which was lying alongside their own.

At last, however, the latter consented to

pull up and instantly the runaway train departed.

In a brief time all were once more aware of the approach of their pursuers. From far in their rear again came the prolonged, agonizing scream of the locomotive.

It was impossible now for the fugitives to stop long enough to enable them to tear up rails or to cut wires. Not far in front of them, however, was one of the long covered bridges which they had planned to burn.

Climbing back into the rear car, Captain Jack said quietly, although his excitement was apparent in the expression of his eyes, "Smash out the rear end of this car! Knock it to pieces! Don't wait a minute! Take your bar and hammer with those ties."

Instantly the men responded, and in a brief time the rear of the car was demolished.

"Now, tumble out those ties," ordered the leader, "and be quick about it! We must leave some of them on the track. This is our last chance."

The men instantly obeyed the command, and from the swiftly moving car, one after another, the dozen ties were hastily hurled upon the track.

Some of the ties rolled down the embankment. The speed of the train was so great that it was almost impossible to determine whether or not many of them had found a lodging-place across the rails.

It was impossible also to stop for investigation. Once the fugitives were able to discern the men on the locomotive that was pursuing them. Indeed, twice, rifles had been fired, but without any result.

"They are having trouble with the ties," whispered Dennis loudly, when after a brief time it was discovered that the locomotive of the enemy no longer could be seen.

"It won't take very much time for the Johnnies to get rid of them," said Frank. "We've got to try something else, though I can't think what it will be."

"We are stopping," said Noel suddenly.

"Not very much," said Frank. "We are only slowing up a bit."

"The bridge can't be very far ahead of us," suggested another of the men.

The conversation was interrupted, however, by the entrance of Captain Jack, who quietly said, "Pile up the broken panels in the middle of the car. Set them on fire. If

we can only get this car to blazing before we come to the bridge, we may be able to do something yet."

Aware of the leader's project, the men instantly obeyed, and soon the box car was a smoking, blazing mass.

As we know, the day was dark and rainy, a condition which caused clouds of heavy smoke to roll far back from the train. All the inmates of the box car had crowded forward into the baggage car, just before the train halted in the middle of the long covered bridge for which they had been looking.

It was but the work of a moment for the men to uncouple the blazing car and leave it in such a position that the fugitives were hopeful that it would not only block the way for their enemies, but also set fire to and perhaps destroy the long covered bridge itself. If this could be accomplished, their purpose in a measure would be successful and their own safety be secured.

Not long after the departure from the bridge, however, it was discovered that the pursuers still were swiftly following. Plainly the daring Confederates, by their own locomotive had driven the blazing car before

them until they had been able to side-track it. Then they had resumed their pursuit and were succeeding in making up some of the time which had been lost.

The plight of the Yankee soldiers now was desperate. Word was whispered among the men that the supply of wood and water was low. Under such circumstances it was hopeless to try to proceed much farther. The speed of the train, however, as yet was not decreasing.

At that moment the car swayed violently as Frank said excitedly, "Look at the trestle over which we are passing!"

Forty feet below them was the bed of a stream flowing through the midst of a deep gully. For a moment every man was startled at the sight, but almost before he could voice his alarm the speeding train was beyond the point of danger.

A brief time afterward, however, it swept so swiftly around a curve in the track that for a moment the men were convinced that the wheels must have left the rails. But still the fleeing train sped forward at a rate of speed greater than that at which any of the occupants of the baggage car had ever ridden.

"But," suggested Dennis, as if aware of the thought in the minds of his companions, "the Johnnies don't let go of us. I must say I niver saw men braver than they."

"I don't see," said Noel, "how it is they have kept to the track. We have torn up rails and thrown ties across the track and it does n't seem possible that they can have escaped them all."

"They have n't escaped them," said Frank. "They have simply stopped and thrown off the ties or replaced the rail."

"They must have lost a good deal of time," said Noel.

"Not so much as you might think," said Frank. "They have n't tried to make everything taut. They have just patched it up enough so that they could pull past."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Captain Jack, who had worked his way back from the locomotive.

"Boys, I'm afraid the game is up," said the leader quietly.

"Don't say that," protested Dennis. "There's a good bit of life left in us yet."

"I know that," said the leader, "but that

can't supply wood and water. We are running low on both."

"Is n't there some place where we can get wood?" inquired Frank eagerly.

"Yes; there is a little station not more than three or four miles ahead of us, but I don't believe we can keep up our steam to get there before these fellows who are after us will overtake us."

"What shall we do," inquired Dennis, "if they catch up? Will we fight 'em, I don't know?"

"But they have rifles."

"Yis, sor," acknowledged Dennis, "but we have our revolvers and our fists."

"I don't think it will be wise to try to make a fight," said the leader, shaking his head positively as he spoke.

"But," again protested Dennis, "why not get out of the car here and lave the engine go on while we hide in the bushes along the railroad? Thin, whin the Johnnies come up, we'll be ready to give 'em what they think they're going to give us."

Several of the men now joined in the discussion and eagerly approved the suggestion of the young Irishman.

The captain, however, decided that such a plan was unwise as well as unsafe, and that it would be better for the men to remain on the car as long as the engine was able to make speed and their pursuers did not overtake them. When the latter should appear, then the leader's suggestion was that every man should be left free to seek safety in flight.

Once more a suggestion was made by Dennis that even in such an event it would be better for the band to keep together, but this did not meet with the approval of most of the men. It was decided that the plan of Captain Jack should be followed when the moment for action should arrive.

"And I'm thinkin' 't is not very far away," broke in Dennis abruptly, as the screech of a locomotive was heard not far behind them.

CHAPTER VI

AN INTERRUPTED CALL

“Two or three miles more will be all that we can make,” said the captain hastily, as he departed from the car and made his way once more over the tender to the locomotive.

The two mechanics who had served as engineer and fireman had rendered most excellent service. Indeed, had it not been for their skill, several times a serious accident might have occurred.

The men in the baggage car now all crowded to the rear, watching the track behind them and expecting every moment that their enemies would be swept into sight.

The flying train was still making swift progress. At times the smoke from the locomotive was so dense that the soldiers were unable to see more than a few yards behind them. Whenever the train dashed around a curve in the road, the men clung to one another as if they were fearful that the car would be flung from the track.

No accident occurred, however, and at last, when it was plain that the panting engine must soon cease its labors, the train was stopped once more in the middle of a wooden bridge that spanned a deep gully.

Hastily the men, at their leader's direction, smashed the sides of the car, while the fireman brought the few remaining coals from beneath the boiler to aid in setting fire to the frail structure.

When the flames began to rise, the labors of the men were interrupted by a shout from Dennis who had been stationed as guard. "Here comes the byes! The Johnnies are after us!"

The time for action had arrived.

As if animated by a common spirit the entire band of sixteen men made their way safely to the opposite end of the bridge, and then, part of them running down one bank, while their companions were disappearing on the opposite side, fled at their utmost speed toward the near-by woods.

No plan had been arranged, and it was by accident that Dennis and the twin Curtis boys found themselves together after they had gone a short distance among the trees.

"'T is every man for himsilf," said Dennis, "but 't is my mind that the three of us better stick together."

"I think so too," said Frank quickly. "What do you think, Noel?" he added, turning to his brother as he spoke.

"I think that is our best plan, for a time, anyway. Come on. The first thing for us to do is to place the greatest possible distance between ourselves and the Johnnies, who will be after us."

Acting upon the suggestion of the young sharpshooter, all three, keeping well together, ran swiftly into the woods. Not one of them knew anything concerning the country in which they now found themselves. Whether or not there was even a roadway near, it was impossible for them to determine.

"We don't know where we're going, but we're in a hurry to get there," said Dennis laconically, when the three fugitives finally halted to recover their breath.

"I know where we want to go," said Frank sharply.

"Where?" inquired Dennis.

"A little farther. We're altogether too

near the railroad to suit me. If we can only get far enough away, we'll have plenty of time to rest."

"And if we don't get far enough away," said Dennis, "the Johnnies will give us all the rest we want."

Conversation ceased as the three young soldiers resumed their flight. The ground was slippery beneath their feet, and from the trees and hanging moss drops of water were falling upon them as they sped forward.

In their eagerness slight heed was given the direction they were following. Somewhere behind them were the men in the gray uniforms who were seeking them. That their enemies were determined and would not speedily abandon their pursuit, all three were well aware.

Intent upon continuing their flight and giving slight heed to their immediate surroundings, the boys were somewhat startled when a few minutes later they found themselves in a beaten track, or rough roadway, that apparently led through the woods.

Running was easier now they discovered when they turned into the pathway. Where-

ever the road might lead, at least by following it they would escape the danger of doubling on their tracks.

The flight was continued another half-hour until the boys suddenly discovered that they were approaching a country roadway. There was no hesitation, however; and the three boys quickly entered it and, turning to their left, resumed their flight.

The long-continued rain, however, had made the road exceedingly muddy. Consequently it was difficult for them to continue on their way at their former speed. They were hungry now as well as weary, and the reaction from the excitement through which they had recently passed, soon manifested itself in the lagging footsteps of the daring young soldiers. While they were in the midst of the excitement of their mad flight from the captured train, not one of them had given any thought to his own necessities. Hunger and thirst alike had been forgotten. Now, however, both feelings had returned, and it was not long before all three were scanning the road before them in their eagerness to discover some place where they might obtain water and food.

Conversation had ceased, but the common motive which was controlling them was clearly understood by all. Occasional stops for rest were made now and a careful watch was maintained for the appearance of their enemies. Doubtless among the Confederates there were some who were familiar with the region and easily would determine the direction in which the escaping soldiers would flee.

An hour had elapsed before a house was seen. At the same moment Dennis and Frank exclaimed, "That place yonder looks as if we could find what we wanted there."

With quickened footsteps the young soldiers hastened forward and in a brief time turned into the lane which led to the unpainted house, which stood about fifty yards back from the road.

"'T is nobody lives here," muttered Dennis, as the boys approached the house and discovered that their coming had not aroused any one within the building. Apparently, too, not even a dog was there. The afternoon was waning and in the deepening dusk the boys were fearful that their enemies might be concealed behind trees or

some of the outbuildings, and would fire upon them before they would be able to seek safety in flight.

Cautiously the boys approached the rear of the house. Scarcely aware of what his companions were doing, each had drawn his revolver and was watchful of every place within sight.

In spite of the neglected appearance of the building, there were a few signs of life to be seen and as a consequence they decided to approach the door and make known their wants.

Dennis, moving cautiously in front of his companions, rapped noisily upon the kitchen door. His hail was answered so abruptly that the young Irishman stepped back in surprise.

Before him stood an old man. For a moment he stared blankly at the unexpected visitor, and then, as he continued silent, Dennis, acting as the spokesman for his friends, who now had joined him, addressed him. "We would be mighty glad if we could find a drink of water and a bite of something to ate."

The old man still stared at Dennis as if

he was unaware of the request which had been made.

"We're willin' to pay for all that we get," continued Dennis, suspecting that the appearance of himself and his comrades did not warrant a feeling of strong confidence on the part of the host. Still the man did not reply.

"Are ye deaf?" inquired Dennis.

Neither Noel nor Frank had any inclination to laugh, although both were aware that Dennis was serious in asking his question.

The old man, however, was silent as he had been before.

"Are ye dumb?" continued Dennis. "If ye be, I know two or three letters with me fingers." Dennis began to make motions, which not even the most skillful talker with his fingers would have been able to interpret.

The old man still stared blankly at Dennis, and it was speedily evident that he did not understand his sign language and also that he was not alarmed by the strange antics of his visitor.

At that moment a woman approached

from the interior of the house, and, standing opposite the old man, looked into the face of Dennis as she said, "Pa is deaf."

"Indade and I began to suspect it," said Dennis. "I thought maybe I could talk to him with me fingers." And the young Irishman quickly began once more to move his fingers as if he would make up by his energy what he lacked in information.

"Whar' do yo' all come from?" inquired the woman, her curiosity evidently becoming stronger than her fear.

"Did you ever hear of Kentucky?" inquired Dennis.

"I suhtainly did. I had a neighbor once who went to Kaintuck and was gone 'most a year. She said she never was so glad to get back to civilization in her life as she was when she come back heah."

"I am not surprised. I don't blame her," said Dennis glibly. "Now we are very thirsty and we're just as hungry as we are thirsty. Where can we get some water?"

"Yo' all look as if you had seen plenty o' water," said the woman. She reëntered the house and speedily returned with a wooden

pail partly filled with water and at the same time handed a gourd to Dennis.

Silence followed her action, while in turn the three young soldiers quenched their thirst.

"And now," said Dennis, "if we can get a bite of something to ate we'll be all made up. Of course we'll pay you for it."

"Pay me fo' it!" said the woman. "I reckon yo' don't know what yo' all 's talking about. We all don't take pay from strangers when they are our visitors."

"All right," said Dennis. "Have it your own way. If you can give us something to ate we won't trouble you any longer."

"I got some co'n bread —"

"That's the very thing we have been waiting for," interrupted Dennis. "How much have you got?"

"I reckon there's about half a pan."

"Have n't you any more?" continued Dennis eagerly.

"I dunno. I'll repo't to yo'," replied the woman, as she turned away to investigate conditions within the house.

In a brief time she returned with a pan partly filled with corn bread.

"I reckon this is 'bout all we got," she explained. "Yo' all are welcome to this. Did yo' all say you was from Kaintuck?"

"Yes," said Dennis. "How much shall I pay you?" he added, eager to turn the conversation into other channels.

"We don't take pay," said the woman. "Did n't I tell yo' all 'bout that befo'?"

"Thank you," said the young Irishman. "If you don't take pay, then perhaps you'll be willing to use this for the sake of the old man. He is your father, I take it?"

"Yes, this is Pop," explained the woman, without protest accepting the coin Dennis placed in her hand. "I reckon yo' all," she continued, still curious as to the cause of the unexpected visit, "might be on your way toe join the army?"

"We are," said Dennis glibly. "How far is it from here?"

"I reckon it's a right sma't way. Sometimes we see the soldiers passing our place, but I never thought toe ask how far they was goin'. There come some of them now," she added abruptly.

Turning hastily about, the three young soldiers saw approaching the house a band

of ten men. No second glance was required to convince them that they were threatened by a part of the force which had pursued them so doggedly in their flight in the captured train.

CHAPTER VII

SEPARATION

THE coming of night had made many of the objects in the yard dim. The light was still sufficient, however, to convince the boys that their first fears were well grounded. It was plain that the approaching band was composed of soldiers and they were so near that the boys, as has been said, were convinced that a band of their recent pursuers was now almost upon them.

"Come inside," whispered Dennis hoarsely. "It may be they have n't seen us yet."

Instantly following the young Irishman, the two boys entered the house and hastily closed the door behind them.

"What yo' all a-doin'?" demanded the woman. "I don't want that door shet."

"Where is the old man?" demanded Frank excitedly.

Ignoring the protests of the troubled woman, the boys speedily discovered that the man, who supposedly was deaf and dumb, had fled from the room.

Advancing to the window, Frank was quickly aware that the old man, no longer decrepit, was running to meet the approaching Confederates. If he was deaf, his ailment speedily was healed, for a moment later Frank saw him conversing with the leader of the approaching force, which now had halted not more than forty feet distant from the house.

The plaintive protests of the woman still continued, but were ignored by the young soldiers. With one accord they approached the window at which Frank was standing and in their excitement a hasty council of war was held.

"Shall we fight or surrender?" inquired Noel, his voice trembling in spite of his efforts to control it.

"We'll not surrender," answered Dennis brusquely.

"But we are only three and there are at least a dozen of the Johnnies."

"It makes no difference if there's a hundred," said Dennis positively. "We're in this war to fight and not to surrender."

"But we have only our revolvers," protested Noel, "and I don't believe yours has

been good for anything, Dennis, since it fell into the water."

"All the more reason why we should fight," declared the sergeant, who was peering from the window at the Confederate force which now was advancing once more.

"What do you think, Frank?" demanded Noel hastily, turning to his brother as he spoke.

"I am not for surrendering now," said Frank quickly. "No one knows what help may come, if we try to defend the place."

"We won't defend it," said Noel. "There are only three of us and they can approach from four sides of the house at the same time."

"Then they will find out there's somebody inside before they come in the door," declared Dennis soberly.

"My suggestion," said Frank, "is that we try to make them think there are more here than the three of us."

"You can't do that," said Noel. "The old man has joined them and told them just how many we are."

"We'll wait a bit anyway," said Frank. "If we can't put up a fight, then we can try

to get out of the house from some one of the other doors. It is growing darker all the time, and if we can wait a little while it may be possible for us to get away without being seen."

"That's our best plan," said Noel confidently. "I am just as willing as either of you to do my best against these fellows, but I don't see any use in a man throwing his life away when he knows that he is n't going to accomplish anything by it."

"The Johnnies will be mighty certain that there was somebody here before that comes to pass," said Dennis grimly.

The whispered conversation ceased when it was seen that the men outside had halted and that one of the band, with the old man, was now approaching the door.

The silence was abruptly interrupted by the shrill voice of the woman.

Unnoticed by the boys she had departed from the room and mounting the stairs had gone to the room directly above them, where her voice now could be heard as she shrilly called through the open window.

"There's only three of 'em," she shouted, "and they're only boys. They have n't any

guns. Come right in, colonel, and get 'em. They were sassy to me. They're Yankees, I know the' are. Bring yo' men right in, an' I reckon yo' won't have a bit o' trouble in takin' ev'ry one of 'em."

The window at which the boys were standing was also open and as, in response to the call of the excited woman, the man outside stepped forward, Dennis called loudly to him, "Don't take another step! We're prepared to defend ourselves and we give you fair warning."

Turning hastily to his companions he said in a loud whisper, "Go upstairs and get that woman. Bring her down here. If she yells, try to stop her, but bring her anyway. Give me your gun," he added to Frank, as the boys quickly turned to do his bidding.

Aware that his warning to the man outside the house was unheeded, Dennis raised his revolver and fired.

Instantly the approaching man halted and, although he did not fall, when he hastily withdrew, it was plain to Dennis that he had been hit.

Confident that the attack on the place now would be vigorously made and yet sus-

pecting that the discharge of his revolver had been a surprise to the enemy, Dennis was eager to try the plan that Frank proposed, which under the circumstances was the only feasible one to follow.

At this moment the brothers returned with the struggling woman. It had been impossible entirely to prevent her from shouting, although Frank did his utmost to prevent her by keeping his hand on her mouth.

"Now, then," said Dennis, as soon as the boys joined him, "put the woman right here by the window. Tell your friends," he said, turning to the woman, "that you are here. If they fire, you will be the first one that will be hit. Tell them!" he added savagely, as the woman for the first time became silent. As he spoke Dennis thrust her in front of him.

The action was sufficient to restore the vocal powers of the terrified woman.

"Pa! Pa!" she shouted. "Don't shoot! It's true what this man says. They are holding me here right in front o' th' window. If any of th' men shoot, I'll be hit."

Whether or not it was due to the woman's

warning, the band outside speedily separated, and instantly Dennis was aware of the plan which they were about to follow.

"'T is time for us to be gone," he muttered to his companions. "Come on, both o' ye."

Running to the opposite side of the house, and unable to discover a door, he quickly raised the window, and instantly he and his companions leaped to the ground below.

"Spread out! Spread out!" whispered Dennis hoarsely as the three young soldiers began to run from the place. "Try to meet in the morning somewhere, if we can," he added.

In accordance with the suggestion of Dennis, the boys separated and, putting forth all their efforts to run noiselessly as well as swiftly, started into the unknown region before them.

For some reason, which neither understood at the time, Frank and Dennis found themselves following the same path-way.

Noel, however, had disappeared and was no longer to be seen by his comrades.

The flight along the path was difficult

because the ground was wet and slippery. The night was dark and the fugitives were able to see only a slight distance before them. Once Dennis ran into a tree and was thrown violently to the ground. His peril, however, prevented him from making any outcry, and soon he resumed his flight, following Frank, who now led the way.

Neither had any conception of the time that had elapsed when at last the two boys halted. They had arrived on the border of the woods and were looking across a field on which recently a crop of some kind had been raised. The desolation of war, however, had made itself apparent even here, and a mass of tangled weeds had already gained a considerable growth in spite of the early season.

"Listen," whispered Dennis; "what shall we do now?"

Not more than five yards distant Frank saw in the dim light a building standing on the border of the field. The fact that it was the only building within sight led him to conclude that it was not a dwelling-house. The natural supposition was that it might be a barn of some kind. If it was unoccupied,

it might be a place where they could obtain shelter until morning.

"Let's try to make that barn," suggested Frank.

"We are not sure 't is a barn," said Dennis.

"We can find out," declared Frank, as resolutely he led the way, and soon both boys were running swiftly toward the building.

Frank's surmise proved to be correct, as they discovered when they arrived at the place they were seeking. The building was a barn, but was in a sad state of repair.

"We ought not to stop here," declared Dennis, as soon as the two young soldiers entered the decaying structure. "It is n't safe. They'll find us, just as sure as to-morrow comes."

"They may get us anyway," said Frank. "We don't know what there is before us and we do know that we may get a little shelter here. As soon as it is light, we may be able to find our way along the road or into the woods where we can hide."

"But it is n't safe here," protested Dennis again.

"Well, what do you suggest?" asked

Frank, somewhat impatiently. "It is easy enough to say what ought not to be done. Now suggest something better."

"I don't know that there is anything 'better.' I'm that tired that I shall be glad to lie down a while, anyway. I wonder if there is any place where we can sleep."

A brief investigation convinced the boys that there was no hay or straw in the building. A part of the ruined structure was covered by a roof, which shut out the rain. Shelter might be found for a time, and the boys decided to remain until they had recovered from their recent exertions.

In spite of their anxiety, both young soldiers were soon sleeping soundly. The reaction from the strain of the recent days had come, and their attempt to flee from the house in which they had been trapped had well-nigh exhausted them. Even their fear of pursuit was not strong enough to keep them awake.

Frank was the first to open his eyes when morning came, and as he did so he was convinced that he had faintly heard some alarming sound. Sleeping on a board floor had been no hardship, and, as soon as he was

awake, Frank instantly arose and peering through the open space, where some of the boards had decayed and fallen away, he saw a sight which quickly caused him to turn and awaken his companion.

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE FLIGHT

“DENNIS! DENNIS!” called Frank sharply.

In a moment the young Irishman was awake and staring intently into the face of his companion.

“What is it? What is it?” he demanded.

“Come here and look out! What do you see?”

For a moment Dennis was silent as he stared through the aperture, in the direction indicated by Frank.

The barn was nearly surrounded by Confederate soldiers. There were at least forty men in the advancing body, and they were so arranged that they were approaching the barn from different directions. If the boys should try to flee through the doorway they were certain to meet their enemies, while if they should make a similar attempt from the rear of the building, there was every probability that they would fall directly into the arms of another band approaching from that side.

"Shall we make a fight of it?" whispered Dennis.

"We are absolutely surrounded, Dennis. We may be able to do a little damage, but in the end we'll be taken. I wonder if there is n't some place here where we can hide?"

As he spoke Frank glanced eagerly about him in every direction, but there was only one place in the barn which promised any protection. Several old and decaying boards were leaning against the walls in the opposite corner. Quickly the two boys darted across the floor and endeavored to conceal themselves behind this frail protection.

If it became necessary they were prepared to sell their lives as dearly as possible, but while there was any hope of escaping the attention of the approaching force, there was every inducement for them to avoid an open contest.

For a time the two boys, almost breathless in their excitement, waited for the coming of the Confederates. They were unable to see what was occurring outside the barn, a fact which increased their suspense.

Both were listening intently and it was not long before they heard the footsteps of several men entering the old building.

A low conversation between the men followed, but neither Dennis nor Frank was able to hear what was said. Soon afterward the men, followed by several others, moved farther into the building and began to investigate the place.

Several were sent to the loft and the boys heard their report when they returned to the floor and declared there was nothing to be found.

"The tracks in the mud led straight to this barn," one of the men was saying, "and we can't find any tracks leadin' away from it."

"There's no one in the loft," declared another of the soldiers. "We examined every inch of it."

"And there ain't any one here," said another, "unless it may be there's somebody hidin' under those boards yonder."

"We can soon tell about that," joined in still another soldier; and advancing to the place where Frank and Dennis were concealed, he quickly threw aside the boards

and the young soldiers were revealed in their hiding-place.

The result which both Frank and Dennis had feared was at hand. They were helpless and prisoners in the hands of men who had shown their determination and spirit by the reckless pursuit they had made on the preceding day.

To the surprise of Frank his captors laughed when he crawled forth from behind the boards.

"I reckon yo' Yanks won't run away with any mo' of our trains," said one of the men, advancing as he spoke. "Now, if yo' please, sir, I shall consider it a kindness if yo' all will jest hand me those guns of yours."

There was no escape, and without a word Frank handed his revolver to the young officer who had spoken. Dennis also followed his example, although his chagrin was plainly manifest in his dejected manner. As yet neither of the boys had been compelled to speak, but this privilege was not long to continue.

At that moment the remaining men in the force came hastily to the barn, some looking

with expressions of anger at the prisoners, while their companions appeared to be merely elated over the capture which had been made.

"Were yo' all a part of the gang that stole the locomotive at Hamlet?" inquired the young officer, who seemed to be the leader of the Confederate band.

"We were," said Dennis promptly.

"It was a brave thing to do," responded the young officer cordially, "but of co'se yo' know what it means for men toe be caught in civilians' clothes, instead of uniforms, inside the lines?"

"We were not spies," spoke up Frank promptly.

"I don't know, sir, that any one has used that term," said the officer. "All I am referring toe, sir, is the fact that yo' all are Union soldiers and were found inside our lines and were dressed in citizens' garb. I don't need toe tell yo', sir, what that implies. We shall be obliged toe bind your arms together, sir. Personally, I regret this, but there is no other co'se to be followed."

Both young soldiers had given up their weapons and neither made any protest when

two men advanced and securely bound their hands behind their backs.

That the condition in which they now found themselves was serious neither Frank nor Dennis had any question. The very boldness of the attempt they had made to steal a part of the train and destroy rails and bridges on the road over which the Confederate soldiers were being sent to the front, doubtless commanded the respect of their enemies, but did not in any way remove the charge which the young officer at least had implied.

A half-dozen men were left with the two prisoners and then the officer, summoning his followers, at once resumed his search for others of the band which had been led by Captain Jack.

Throughout the day the prisoners were kept under guard in the barn, their captors sharing their somewhat scanty rations with them and occasionally entering into conversation. One of the captors was a ruddy-cheeked boy, nearly of Frank's age. He was most pronounced in the intensity of his feelings toward the men who had "invaded his country," but for his young

prisoner he seemed to cherish only friendly feelings.

"We're goin' to get every one of yo' all," he declared confidently. "We already have two, and there were only sixteen all together."

"How do you know how many there were?" said Frank, striving to speak lightly, although his heart was heavy.

The young Confederate laughed as he replied, "Yo' all seem to think yo' will catch us nappin' some day. Let me tell yo', sir, that when the South has once been thoroughly aroused, such Yankee tricks as yo' all thought yo' could carry through will not last a day with us, sir. No, sir, not a day."

There were other times when the prisoners were left to themselves and only a guard of two or three soldiers remained in charge of them.

About the middle of the afternoon five soldiers brought in two more of Frank's recent companions in the daring attempt to steal the railway train. An hour afterward two others also were taken, while near night-fall the young lieutenant and his party returned with three more.

Among the last was the leader, Captain Jack, and the two mechanics who had taken charge of the locomotive when it had been uncoupled from the train at Hamlet.

To the surprise of the prisoners they were compelled to remain in the barn throughout the night. The accommodations for sleeping were very scant and the frequent changing of the guards also helped to prevent Frank and Dennis from closing their eyes.

When morning came two other prisoners were brought by the men who had been scouring the region, so that the number of those who had been taken was now increased to eleven.

A more dejected body of soldiers it would have been impossible to find in the entire South. And yet there was a determination still manifest on the part of every one, in spite of his keen disappointment, to be as bold and brave as possible under the circumstances.

Several of the band of captors had secured from the farms near by sufficient food to feed themselves and also to provide in part for the wants of their prisoners.

As the hours passed and no signs of with-

drawal from the place were manifest, Frank and Dennis, who had kept near each other in their imprisonment, as they had in their previous experiences, were standing near the door of the barn when the young lieutenant once more returned. This time, however, he had not succeeded in increasing the number of his prisoners.

His boyish face lighted up with pleasure and pride as he glanced at the men inside the row of guards which had been stationed about the barn.

“Eleven out o’ sixteen ain’t so bad,” he said to the two young soldiers. “Doubtless all the others will be waitin’ to meet you when we —” Whatever the plan in the mind of the young officer was, he did not reveal it, and his two hearers consequently were left in suspense as to the disposition which was to be made of them.

Frequently conversations were held between the prisoners and their guards, for instead of being merely angered by the bold adventure of the Northern soldiers, the Confederates were willing to acknowledge that the attempt had been “mighty peart.”

“When none of yo’ all goes back to repo’t,

I reckon some of yo' friends won't be quite so bold. They'll know better than toe push their heads inside a noose. Yo' all were certain toe be taken," said the young officer glibly.

"Not at all," said Frank tartly.

"The most of yo' all are here anyway."

"That's true, but if we had followed the other plan and had not tried to scatter, I think just as many of us would have been here, and perhaps some of you would not."

"What is that, sir? What do yo' mean, sir?" demanded the officer.

"We had a slight difference of opinion as to which plan was the better. Some of us wanted to scatter, and the others wanted to keep together and form an ambuscade."

"I reckon yo' scattered," laughed the soldier, "but let me tell yo' all, Yank, whichever plan yo' followed, yo' would all have been certain sure toe wish yo' had taken th' other one."

"I guess that's so," acknowledged Frank, trying to speak lightly.

"I reckon yo'll have plenty of time to think it over," laughed the Confederate soldier not ill-naturedly. "It will be some

time befo' yo' Yanks will have another chance to get toe work on wooden nutmegs and such like things."

An hour later the prophecy of the guard proved to be true, for a command was given for the prisoners to fall in line, and, attended by the entire band of thirty soldiers, they marched from the old barn which had been their prison for a day.

CHAPTER IX

WITHIN THE STOCKADE

SEVERAL miles had been covered before a halt was called. Frank, who was very much depressed, looked about him with interest and discovered that a stop had been made in a hamlet in which a large force of Confederate soldiers had halted, so that their noon-day meal might be served.

The prisoners were conducted through the midst of this force, all the soldiers casting curious glances upon them as they marched past. In the glances there was a very pronounced expression of admiration, mingled with that of enmity. Doubtless rumors had already spread among the soldiers that the prisoners were the men who had attempted to steal a railway train two days before. The recognition of bravery usually commands the respect even of opponents.

The prisoners were led through the wide rambling street and did not halt until they arrived at the jail. Here they were turned

into the jail yard, after a guard had been placed over them; then they were left free to move about within the confines.

They were soon fed, and, although the fare was homely, both Dennis and Frank agreed that never before had they tasted food they more enjoyed.

When night approached, all were taken within the jail and placed behind the bars. The cells were crowded and because of the conditions surrounding him it was long before sleep came to the young sharpshooter. There were moments when it seemed to him that he must arouse his companions and summon them to break from the dilapidated old jail. Had it not been for the guards that were known to be stationed outside, it is doubtful if the building, which was in a sad state of repair, would long have held the daring and resolute young men who now were confined within it.

Three days followed, more dreary and hopeless than any that Frank had ever experienced. There were rumors of prison pens to which, it was said, they were to be taken. There were stories repeated of the hardships endured by the unfortunate men

who had been taken in battle and sent to these dreary places. An occasional story of some prisoner who had escaped provided a slight variety, but the explanation that these unfortunate men were usually run down by bloodhounds increased Frank's feeling of depression. Even Dennis, whose heart apparently was still light, was unable to arouse his friend from his despondency.

Dennis, himself, however, on the morning of the fourth day was greatly cast down when a report was spread among the prisoners that their leader, Captain Jack, the two mechanics who had managed the stolen locomotive, and also two others of the prisoners had been shot.

There was still danger that the same fate might overtake the other members of the little band. All were aware now that it was no light matter for soldiers to be found in the garb of citizens within the enemy's lines. And every prisoner in the jail yard had been guilty of this breach of military law.

The following day a diversion came when the men were informed that they were to be taken from the place by train. Just what this meant every prisoner thought he under-

stood, and yet few ventured to voice the fear in their hearts.

It was nearly noon, however, before the long-expected train arrived. A long line of freight cars drew near the station, but it was not until it stopped that Frank and Dennis were able to see that it was already apparently filled with men. And the men were all Union prisoners. In the crowded cars some were standing, some were seated, while others were spread out on the board floors. All of them showed plainly the effects of their hardships and of a long, wearisome journey.

At the station the men aroused themselves when food and water were offered them. Following this event there were some who broke out into noisy singing, or shouted their calls to their comrades confined in cars at the opposite end of the train.

"In you go!" said a major, quietly approaching the place where the recently taken prisoners were standing in a group near the track.

Just where they were to "go" Frank at first was unable to see, inasmuch as the car directly in front of him already seemed to be filled to its utmost capacity.

In spite of the apparent lack of space, one by one the fresh prisoners climbed into the car or were lifted and thrust in bodily by the guard.

It was not long before the train resumed its journey. Slowly the long line of cars crossed the country, stopping only twice, and then on the switch of the single track to enable other trains to pass.

The progress of the train was slow, and after a day and a night had passed, it seemed to Frank as if he would not be able to endure his cramped quarters another hour.

At last, however, the journey, like other experiences, came to an end. When Frank looked out of the car he saw that Confederate soldiers were outside and that some of the prisoners already were being taken from the train.

It was not long before the car in which Dennis and Frank had been carried was cleared. Between a double line of soldiers the men passed from the car and then were formed into a detachment. Then the men were commanded to advance, and, under the escort of a heavy guard, were led through what seemed to the troubled young sharp-

shooter to be a long, rambling street. At last they stopped before a large gate in a stockade.

Frank was positive that he required no information as to the nature of the place. He was startled, however, when he was informed by one of the Confederate soldiers that twelve thousand of the boys in blue already were confined there.

Before him Frank saw that the prison was located on two adjoining hillsides. Through the center, between the hills, a sluggish brook made its way. When he entered within the gates he looked out upon a strange and startling sight.

Not a sign of vegetation was to be seen on any side. Frank's squad was ordered to take a position not far from the border on the lower side of one of the hills. Near by was a swamp. Doubtless this was the brook he had noticed when he was outside. The odors, however, which rose from the stagnant waters were almost overpowering. The contrast between the sight upon which he now looked and his distant home, of which he had a momentary vision, was so great that in spite of the boy's courage one heavy,

dry sob escaped his lips. To make matters even worse, rain now began to fall and in a brief time streams of filthy water were creeping down the hillside.

Fortunately, both Dennis and Frank, when the prisoners had been searched, had been able to conceal a part of the money which they had received when they had departed from their own army on their perilous enterprise. Several of the men also had been permitted to retain their blankets. Among these fortunate prisoners were Frank and Dennis.

"Sure," said Dennis, "and soon we'll have a castle fit for a king." The resolute young Irishman, looking out over the prison, saw here and there tents which had been erected of blankets. These commonly were called "A" tents, and were fashioned by driving two stakes into the ground, at a distance of six or seven feet apart. Then two other stakes were similarly driven. These formed the framework for the ends of the tent. In the crotch left at each end, a pole was placed, and over this, blankets were stretched. The opening consequently was not unlike the shape of the letter "A," the

name of which had been given the "shebang," as the prisoners called their tents, or places of refuge.

When there were sufficient blankets, the rain usually could be kept out of each end of the tent. There were many tents, however, which did not have this full protection, but even this poor shelter was better than that which many of the men had. In some places they had dug into the hillside for places of refuge, burrowing somewhat after the fashion of rabbits.

Not long after the hasty construction of the boys' tent, one of the Confederate guards who was off duty at the time, approached the mess to which Frank and Dennis belonged and stopped to inspect their work.

"Yo' Yanks are the doggondist fellows I ever did count," drawled the guard, not ill-naturedly.

"How's that?" said Dennis brusquely.

"We found a Yank to-day who contrived to belong to two or three squads. He had been drawin' his rations from each one and nobody suspected him. Some of our sergeants to-day, when they found out that they had been issuing rations for five hun-

dred more men than there were in camp, made up their minds that it was time some-thin' was done."

"How did the Yanks manage it?" laughed Dennis.

"Why, they slipped, quick as lightnin', from one squad to another and so got counted twice. Colonel Iverson gave it up to-day when he found he could n't get a straight count, nohow, of the prisoners. The colonel was pretty good-natured about it, though, and all he said was that the Yanks were 'mighty cute.' But the colonel got even with them."

"How was that?" asked Dennis.

"Why, he marched the prisoners out into the open space in the camp and kept them there in line until they were counted. But even then it did not always work. Some of the men in the rear ranks managed it so that in one detachment about nine hundred men counted up one thousand, and the colonel could n't straighten it out, nohow. It made me think o' Cuffee."

"Who's he?" said Dennis.

"Why, he was a nigger man of the colonel's, who went out one day to count the

pigs. When he came back the colonel asked him if he had counted them all and Cuffee said he had, 'all 'cept a little speckled one and he had run around so fast he could n't count him, nohow.'"

In spite of his anxiety Frank smiled, while Dennis laughed heartily at the story.

Thus encouraged, the guard continued, "I'm wonderin' if yo' all have any greenbacks."

"Why? Do you want them?" inquired Dennis.

The slow-spoken guard glanced hastily about him, displaying the first sign of animation he had shown since his arrival.

"No, sir. No, sir," he said quickly. "It's a criminal offense toe take them in pay. I was just askin' fo' yo' own comfort. Some o' the prisoners have some money and they manage toe get a few things beside their rations, but the price has gone up. They're askin' \$1 for a loaf of bread, and \$10 for a bushel o' sweet potatoes, \$1 for three flat turnips, and \$10 for an ounce of black pepper."

"Is that all?" demanded Dennis soberly. "Sure, and I thought the prices would be

higher nor that. Are they the prices in greenbacks or in Confederate money?"

"Confederate money, o' course."

"H-m-m," muttered Dennis. "And how much is a \$1 greenback worth in Confederate money?"

"About \$10."

"Why, then the prices are n't so bad," joined in Frank, who was interested deeply in the conversation. "Perhaps a little later we shall be able to do some trading."

"H-s-sh," said the guard, again glancing about him as he spoke. "It mought be that I could do somethin' in the way of provisions after a time, but yo' all must n't let any suspicion get out. I am sorry for yo' all, Yanks, and that's the only reason why I take any hand in this."

"I saw you were kind-hearted the first time I laid me eyes on you," said Dennis. "Maybe we'll have some more chance to arrange for this."

Dennis stopped abruptly, for the man to whom he was speaking at that moment turned sharply away and departed as if he was unaware of the presence of the prisoners.

CHAPTER X

PRISON-MATES

THE approach of another guard had been the cause of the abrupt departure of the loquacious visitor.

The newcomer was a man of a different type, sharp and brusque in his manner, and the expression of his face was not one that would lead an observer to undue confidence either in his mercy or sympathy.

As the new guard stopped in front of the boys, Dennis said to him abruptly, "And what is the name of the man who has just gone on?"

The guard glanced in the direction of the departing man and said, "His name is Cheatham."

"And a good name to have when he has to stay in this hole."

"It is a better place than you deserve!" said the guard angrily. "Cheatham — some times we call him 'Serg. Cheatham' — is too easy. He ain't willin' to give yo' all yore deserts."

"I noticed," said Dennis, "that he was something of a gentleman."

"My advice to you," repeated the guard, "is toe 'tend toe yore own affairs and have as little as possible toe do with old Serg. Cheatham."

"Thank you kindly, sor," said Dennis, as the guard passed on.

The good-natured young Irishman turned to his companion, resolute to do his utmost to cheer the heart of the downcast young sharpshooter.

"'T is all in a day," he said glibly. "Everything depinds upon the way you look at it. I can see something funny even in this place, and I'm tellin' you that we've got to find it, or we'll look like that skelington coming toward us." As he spoke Dennis pointed toward a forlorn individual approaching their "shebang."

The man was without any hat, only strips of his shirt remained upon his shoulders, and his trousers resembled those which a certain newsboy is said to have described as "a string of holes tied together." Besides, the sunken eyes, the emaciated frame, and the flush in the cheeks of the wretched man

showed that he was not only ill-clad, but also was suffering from the last stages of a fatal disease. Like his predecessor he too stopped a moment in front of the boys and solemnly gazed at them.

"Mebbe I looked like you," he said, "when I first came here. The boys used to call me 'Big Sam'; but there is n't much left of him, I'm afraid," he added, shaking his head sadly. "Where do you belong?" he inquired.

"The ———th of New York," responded Dennis promptly.

"Let me give you a little advice. I see you have some blankets here. Don't leave 'em."

"Why not?" inquired Dennis.

"Because somebody will steal 'em. I had some good blankets when I first came, but now I have n't anything to keep out the rain. About all I can do is to sicken and die."

"'T is not so bad as that," said Dennis cheerfully.

Disregarding the suggestion the wretched man continued, "And they will steal your cooking utensils, too. That's almost as bad

as stealing your blankets. If I was as fresh and strong as you two boys are I'd join the Regulators."

"What are the Regulators?"

"Why, it's a band the boys are forming to pay off these rascals that are stealing the clothes from the mouths and the provisions from the backs, — no, that is n't what I mean," said the man wearily. "I guess you know what I mean." And without another word he passed on.

Dennis, leaving his companion for a brief time, ventured into another part of the prison, but he soon returned, plainly troubled, although he did not explain his feelings to his friend. For some reason Frank had been unable to rally from the depression which had seized upon him. The sight of the great numbers of his unfortunate fellow soldiers now confined at Andersonville, the hopeless expression on the countenances of many, as well as the fact that already he had discovered that many of the men had lost their reason and had become either partial idiots or insane, had prevented him from sharing in his companion's determination to look for the hopeful side of their life.

"Frank," said Dennis bluntly, "this will never do. Never."

"Won't it?" said Frank drearily. "There's one consolation, it won't last very long."

"It won't if you go on that way," retorted Dennis. "The thing for you and me to do is just to make up our minds that we're not goin' to give in. It does n't do a man any good to have grit when there's nothing hard to face. As I look at it, the time for a man to have grit is when he is in such a place as this looks to be. I've been finding out about our rations," he added lightly.

"Have you?" inquired Frank, without any apparent interest.

"Yis, sor. I find every man has a bit of Indian meal, composed mostly of the ground cob. Once in two days he gets a teaspoonful of salt. Some time ago they used to give out some bacon, about fifteen pounds for ninety men, but they have n't any more bacon and so they don't give it out."

Still Frank apparently was uninterested. Disregarding his listlessness, Dennis continued, "Sometimes, instead of Indian meal they give us rice or banes, but I'd rather have the rice than the banes."

“Why?”

“Because they say that every bane is occupied.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Frank, for the first time showing any interest.

“Why, they say there’s a grub or a worm inside ivery bane. They need n’t put them in for me,” added Dennis. “I like my banes clear. It seems the boys soak the meal in water until they have a thick dough, then they sprinkle a little meal over the bottom of a plate or canteen, if a man is lucky enough to have one, and that keeps the dough from sticking. When the dough has been put on the plate they set it up to be cooked before the fire. When the front of the cake is done, then they take a split stick and fix the plate in it and hold it over the coals until the dough is burned or baked through. I saw some of the boys who had taken a half of a canteen and punched holes through it with a sixpenny nail; then they sifted their meal through it, but they said once was enough and they would never do so any more.”

“Why not?”

“Because there was so little of the meal

left there was n't enough to eat. They say," continued Dennis, "that one of the great difficulties here is to get wood. You see, before they used this place for a prison, the ground was all covered over with pitch pine, but there have been so many of our poor boys here that they have cut away all the trees. The only wood any of the men can get now is from the roots and the stumps of the trees which have already been cut down."

"Then, too," he hastily added, as he saw that Frank's spirits were in no wise lightened by his report, "it appears all of our men are divided into squads of ninety. Over each ninety one of their own men serves as sergeant. Over every three nineties there's a chief sergeant and he draws the rations for all three."

"How often do they give out rations?"

"Every twenty-four hours."

"Where do you get them?"

"It seems you go up to the gate, and there the prison authorities disburse their dainties. The sergeants of the nineties turn around after they have received their apportionments and divide them up among the ser-

geants of thirty or of ten, and in this way all the delicious food is soon divided. I saw some brought in a little while ago. Mule teams, driven by negroes for the most part, bring it in, though I saw a few white men, too, that were drivers, doing the hauling."

"Do you mean some of the prisoners are drivers?"

"That's what they tell me. It seems that they are paroled and detailed for that very thing. Maybe some day I will get to be a sergeant of ninety. If I do it will mean that I shall be entitled to draw an extra ration for all my trouble. The men tell me that the rations are n't as good as they were a little while ago. I suppose it is harder for the Johnnies to get what we need to eat when they're hungry too. There are a good many more of us here now than they had to feed a few months ago, and I am thinkin' there is a pretty steady demand among their soldiers for all they have got to eat, anyway."

"'T is funny, too, they tell me," continued the loquacious Dennis, "to see three or four men join together to make a johnny-cake. One of them cuts the wood with his jack-knife, another stirs up the meal, and another

gets the fire ready. Then, when the fire begins to burn, one kneels down and acts as a pair of bellows that blows and blows and blows and the smoke sometimes goes up his nose. — My, but I'm almost a poet," said Dennis. "It just seems to run out o' me. Whinever I open my mouth a poem begins to spill. So I say, Frank, don't be a crank, — and I can't think of the rest of it just now," added Dennis, hopelessly scratching his head.

Frank smiled, but his response was not as cordial as the young Irishman desired.

"They tell me, too," resumed Dennis, "that it is a great sight. All around the camp you will find men on their hands and knees, blowing until their faces are as red as the fire, and the tears runnin' down their cheeks. They say the tears make white furrows a quarter of an inch deep in the dirt and smoke on every face. Personally, I think that is a poor trick. We'll have a chance to try it ourselves, Frank, pretty quick. Look yonder, will you," broke in Dennis, pointing as he spoke to a man approaching the place where the two young prisoners were standing. "That man was

once fat. See how loose the skin on his neck is. And now just see what he is. He is mostly a composition of skin and bones and pitch-pine smoke. Indade and how is a man goin' to take a bath without any water? And look at his hat, or is it a band he has around his head. Just look at his hair, too, see how it comes straight up through the hole in the top of his hat, as if it was an Indian plume. He's coming to see us, Frank."

The young Irishman had spoken truly, for the strange man now halted in front of the boys.

"I have been looking about a bit," he explained, "to see if you have learned how to take care of your johnny-cake. I notice you have thrown away a little piece. If you don't mind, I think I'll take it."

"But it has something on it," explained Frank in disgust.

"That will be all the better," said the other prisoner. "You will find out that you can't be too particular, and everything you swallow that can be digested will help to keep you alive until you can be exchanged."

"How long will that be?"

"Very soon now, I am thinking," said the

man, his pitiful expression changing for a moment. "There's a report that an exchange is going to be made next week. Let me give you another point. The best way to cook your meal is to mix it in water, and you'll have enough meal to make a dumpling about the size of a hen's egg. Then you boil your dumpling with bits of bacon about as big as marbles. Keep on boiling, until the bacon floats on the top of the soup."

Frank, unable to repress his feeling of disgust, said, "We would n't feed that stuff to the pigs on my father's farm."

"No more you would n't," said the stranger, "but to my mind if I could have what is given the pigs to eat in old York State I would think I was living on the fat of the land. I tell you, boys, it is a living death here."

"But," interrupted Dennis. "I have seen some things that made me laugh, though I never knew a man to laugh at his own funeral."

The expression on the face of the visitor was unchanged, as shaking his head he said, "I am telling you there's not one ray of comfort to be found in all the darkness here.

I spoke about exchanges. I have been a prisoner here almost a year. Along at first I believed I was going to be exchanged very soon. Reports would be scattered that arrangements had been made and that 'next week' was the time set. It has been 'next week' all through the year," added the man gloomily, almost as if he was unconscious of the presence of the boys.

"But," demanded Dennis, "don't some of the men escape?"

"They try."

"But don't they really do it?"

"There's one man here that we call Uncle Sim, who has got outside the stockade five times."

"If he got outside, why did n't he stay outside?"

"Bloodhounds," replied the man, shuddering as he spoke.

By this time their strange visitor had disposed of the few crumbs of the johnny-cake, which he had found cast away by the recent arrivals.

As he turned away, Dennis said, "Don't be down-hearted, Frank. Niver forget that

there is a to-morrow. I am goin' to find out more about escapin'."

"Don't forget the bloodhounds," added Frank gloomily.

CHAPTER XI

LIFE IN THE PRISON

DISREGARDING the suggestion of his companion, Dennis departed, whistling as he went. If the manner of the young soldier had been made a test of his feelings, an observer would have said that the young Irishman was thoroughly enjoying himself.

Left behind, Frank seated himself upon the damp ground and disconsolately held his head in his hands. To the wearied, hungry boy the scene about him was one to destroy even his last vestige of hope. On every side he saw men, skeleton-like in their appearance; but the expression of their faces was what most impressed the troubled young prisoner. Homesickness had done its part in bringing these results to pass. Insufficient food, lack of means by which even this food could be properly prepared, filth and neglect, almost seemed to be the portion of every one.

Two hours elapsed before the return of Dennis. Still cheerful in his appearance, he

said to his comrade, "I have seen a strange sight, Frank, me boy."

The young soldier lifted his head and gazed stolidly at Dennis, but otherwise did not respond.

"Indade I have," said Dennis. "I have found men painting their faces."

"What for?"

"It was n't because they planned to do it, but they are covered with pitch-pine smoke. Indade, and I have seen their anxiety painted in that color. You see it's this way," he explained. "The man who blows the fire gets down on his hands and knees and he blows until he's red in the face and th' tears are runnin' down his cheeks. The tears make furrows which he does n't like. Pretty soon he is sniffing, blowing, coughing, and choking with the smoke, and most of all when the wind helps to blow some of it down his throat."

"What is the trouble?" inquired Frank wearily.

"The wood is no good and the fireman no better. It is time, me boy, for you and me to see if we can dig out some wood for ourselves. I have the promise of the loan of an

axe. The man that owns an axe in Andersonville is rich."

Silently Frank arose and followed his friend. Securing the axe which had been promised Dennis, the two prisoners walked to the border of the camp, where, after many efforts, they succeeded in drawing from the ground a few roots of the pine trees.

"It is n't very dry," said Frank when they started to return with their arms partly filled.

"Not so very dry," acknowledged Dennis, "but when we get our fire started, I think it will burn all right. Come on back now, Frank, and we'll soon have a meal fit for a king."

"King of what?"

"Don't draw it too fine," laughed Dennis, delighted that his friend was for the first time showing some signs of interest and animation.

"Now, we'll be busy in a little while and the prospect of such a fine feast is worth lookin' forward to."

Dennis, who was quick to adopt the measures which he found prevailing in the camp, soon had a split stick prepared. He already

had secured a small tin pail for which he paid the sum of two dollars in greenbacks.

"We have a fine outfit," said Dennis delightedly, "and soon we'll be the envy of ivery one in the prison. I'll lave you for a few minutes, Frank, while I look about and see if I can't buy some other things we nade."

Left to himself, Frank at once kindled a small fire, over which he hung the little tin pail with its meal and water. Strive as he would, however, the troubled boy was unable to accomplish much. While he stirred the meal the fire burned low, and when he turned to blow the fire, the hanging tin pail, freed from his assistance, threatened to tip over.

For a long time Frank labored without much success in preparing the meal, to which, he was aware, Dennis was eagerly looking forward. In the midst of it all there came a downpour of rain, which prevented all further attempts.

Glancing at the heavy clouds, Frank thrust the pieces of wood into his pockets, trying to keep some of them, at least, from being soaked by the shower.

An hour or more later when Dennis returned, the clouds had lifted and the two young prisoners renewed their attempt to prepare dinner.

Their efforts to make the fire draw, however, were apparently unavailing. They blew upon it until it seemed to them almost as if the breath had left their bodies. At last after they succeeded in starting the fire, the wood burned out before they had finished their "scald."

At that moment a fellow prisoner drew near the place, and, deeply interested in the activities of the boys, stopped to watch them.

When Frank looked up he discovered the newcomer and also was aware that in spite of his appearance he was not much older than he.

"Look out for the flankers," warned their visitor.

"And what are flankers?" inquired Dennis, standing erect and facing the young man as he spoke.

"It's plain you have n't been here long," said the other prisoner good-naturedly. "Flankers, — why, that's what we call the

thieves. They will steal your mush and your pail, too, if you don't keep on the lookout for them."

"They won't get much, I'm afraid," said Dennis ruefully, "if they take everything we have. I can't even buy anything in the camp. I have done me best and tried to buy a potato for Frank, but when I found there were only a few who had thim and they had paid about two dollars apiece for thim, I knew there was n't very much use in lookin' any further."

"I found some potato peelings myself to-day," said the visitor. "I saw a man who had bought two or three and I just hung around until he peeled them. Then I ate the peelings, every one, when the man was n't watching me."

"And what for?" demanded Dennis blankly.

"I have been threatened with the scurvy. There's nothing so good for it as a potato, unless it is an onion. I have almost forgotten how an onion looks, tastes, or smells, it has been so long since I have seen one."

"And how long have you been here?" inquired Frank.

"Forever," said the young prisoner, smiling. "I figured up the days, though, and it seems I have been here about six months."

"Are n't you expecting to be exchanged?" inquired Frank.

"I was, but I'm not now."

"But there have been exchanges made," persisted Frank.

"So I hear, but it is like the lightning, not one of them has ever struck me."

"We would invite you to stay to dinner," said Dennis, "only there are two reasons why we can't. One of them is that we have n't any dinner and the other is that we have n't any place to which we can invite you."

"That's all right," said the young prisoner, smiling in a manner that served to intensify his emaciation. "I'll take the word for the deed. If you will give me a piece I will come around here in the morning and I'll tell you where you can get a johnny-cake as big as the top of my hat. You'll have to pay for it, though."

"We'll do that," said Dennis. "We managed to hide a little money when we came into the camp."

"Don't use it all, Dennis," said Frank warningly.

"Niver you fear, lad. Trust Dennis O'Hara to look after the pennies; some one else can look after the pounds. And what did you say your name is?" he inquired as he turned once more to their visitor.

"I did n't say, but my name is John Oatman."

The following morning John again came to the place where the two prisoners were encamped. Frank was in the same disconsolate frame of mind which had controlled him the preceding day. Dennis, however, was still apparently undaunted by his surroundings and determined not to be overcome by his difficulties.

"I have brought you a treat," said John, as he held up to view a johnny-cake about six inches in diameter.

"And where did you get that?" demanded Dennis.

"I bought it."

"And how much did you pay for it?"

"I gave a pair of socks for it. I had two pairs and felt like a nabob. It does n't do to

put on airs in Andersonville, so I traded my extra pair for this johnny-cake and have brought it here to let you two boys share it with me."

The visitor spoke in monotonous tones, but his willingness to share, in spite of the intense hunger that was manifest in his expression, deeply touched both his newly made friends.

"Hold on a bit," said Dennis, as John prepared to divide the johnny-cake. "Wait till I fix something to catch the crumbs." Spreading his coat upon the ground, he bade John break the johnny-cake over it, so that no crumbs would be lost.

The action of Dennis caused a slight smile to appear on the face of Frank, but all three were now so hungry that no time was wasted in conversation.

"There comes Uncle Sim," said John, when their meal was nearly ended. "He's been a prisoner here almost a year and has been worn down almost to a shadow. He's the most restless man in the camp and the thinnest, too, for of course he does n't get the kind of food he ought to have. What's most remarkable about him, however, is the

fact that he has tried to escape five times and has been captured every time."

"Yes, they say the bloodhounds brought him back," said Dennis. "We were told about him yesterday. Tell him to stop here and we'll give him what is left of the johnny-cake."

"But there is n't anything left and there is n't going to be any," said Frank slowly.

"Yes, but that's what we're going to give him," said Dennis.

At this time Uncle Sim approached, simply saying as he drew near, "How are ye?"

Seating himself upon the ground the man, who apparently was about thirty-five years of age, looked first at one member of the party and then at another, as if he was expecting from some one an invitation to join the repast.

"You're just too late, Uncle Sim," said John. "If you had been here a little earlier we might have given you a treat."

"I had a treat yesterday," said Uncle Sim, smiling. "I had some johnny-cake and 'lasses. The best meal I have had since I left old Kentuck'."

"They are telling me," suggested Dennis,

“that you have tried to escape from this place.”

“I ‘tried’ all right, but that’s about as far as I got.”

“How far away from the camp did you get?”

“The farthest was about five miles. The dogs treed me and then the guard brought me down out of the tree. There’s only one sure way of getting out of Andersonville.”

“What is that?” said Frank eagerly.

“And that is to die,” answered Uncle Sim. “I’m thinkin’ of trying that myself.” The man spoke in a monotonous tone, as if he was referring to a matter of everyday occurrence.

Frank shuddered as he heard the doleful statement, but Dennis merely laughed. “I’m thinkin’ Andersonville is n’t the only place a man leaves like that. I have heard of men leavin’ fine homes in just that same way,” suggested Dennis.

“But I’m serious,” persisted Uncle Sim.

“No, no,” said Dennis. “You’re too game for that.”

The surprise of Dennis and Frank the following morning may well be imagined

when John Oatman came to their "shebang" with the report that Uncle Sim had died early that morning.

"Come with me and I'll show you how they take the dead out of the prison," he added.

CHAPTER XII

A FRANTIC FARMER

MEANWHILE what had befallen Noel? When the three young soldiers had fled from the old farmhouse, it had been more by chance than design that Dennis and Frank had found themselves following the same pathway. The first thought in the mind of every one was safety, which he was convinced depended first of all upon the distance he placed between himself and the Confederate soldiers that had approached the house from which the boys had escaped.

Unaware of the action of his companions, Noel had turned sharply and followed a path near a rambling and dilapidated fence. Twice he had thrown himself upon the ground behind the protecting stumps of trees, but in each case he had resumed his flight, after an interval of waiting had convinced him that he was not closely pursued.

In a brief time the young soldier found himself once more in the road from which

he and his recent companions had turned when they had first seen the old farmhouse.

Peering intently in either direction, Noel soon was convinced that no men now were within sight. That the pursuit of the fugitives would be vigorously pushed, however, he was well aware. Stopping for a moment to regain his breath and to think more definitely over his perplexing problems, he soon entered the road and turned to his left. In this direction it seemed to him that he would be more likely to find his brother and the young Irish soldier who had been their companion.

At frequent intervals Noel halted to make certain that others were not on the road. In this manner, alternately running and stopping for rest and investigation, Noel fled on through most of the hours of the night.

Faint traces of the dawn were to be seen when at last he heard sounds of horsemen on the road behind him. The muddy condition of the road had caused him to avoid walking in it. By keeping more closely to the borders he thought he would be able to

avoid the peril that might arise if his footprints should be seen in the soft soil.

The sound of possible pursuers, however, caused the young soldier to dart into the wood close by. Without waiting to investigate further the character of the men who certainly were approaching, he spied a narrow pathway which he swiftly followed. He had, however, halted after he had gone twenty yards within the woods to ascertain whether or not the men in the road were still advancing. Convinced that they had continued on their way, he resolved to follow the pathway, which naturally must lead somewhere. All places in the vicinity were alike to him in his ignorance. Peril might be found in any, and safety as difficult to secure in one place as in another.

Pushing forward in the dim light, Noel began to run, although he was unable to explain to himself why immediate haste was required.

Suddenly his foot slipped in the soft soil and he was thrown heavily upon the ground. The protruding branch of a great fallen tree near by struck him full in the face and in a moment Noel was aware that his left

eye was bleeding and that its sight was dim.

Alarmed by the accident, he nevertheless continued on his way until an hour or more had elapsed, when he suddenly found himself on the outskirts of a little hamlet

The sun already had risen and in the early morning light the humble hamlet seemed to the troubled boy to be most inviting. His eye now was paining him intensely, and in his desperation he decided that he must speedily find help.

As he advanced, he became aware that the little village was larger than at first he had thought. Few people were stirring in the early hours, but coming toward him Noel saw an old man who was carrying a basket on his arm.

"Mo'nin'," called the stranger heartily as he drew near.

"Good-morning," replied Noel. "I have met with an accident. Tell me where I can find a physician."

"I reckon yo' all ought toe know that most o' th' doctors are with Lee's army."

"Is n't there any one here who can help me?"

"I'm thinkin' mebbe there's a young journeyman sawbones just out o' his time, what settled here soon 's all the good men left fo' th' war. He mought be able toe do something fo' yo' all."

"Why did n't he go to the war?" inquired Noel, still holding his handkerchief to his wounded eye.

"He's a bit lame. I'm not sayin' as he ain't a pretty good doctor, but I never did see how a man could play so many tricks as he can, 'specially in a time like this."

"What kind of tricks?" inquired Noel.

"Any kind. He's a great wag. Why, Mr. Stranger, he would hoax yo' all jest as soon as he would his best friend. He does n't care what th' age or condition o' any one is, if he can only play his joke. He gets a 'stringer' on 'most every one that goes near him, but we all have toe go toe him, seein' as he's the only 'Pills' for miles 'round. And the worst of it is, that there are always people who are ready toe help him carry out his hoaxes."

"Where is he? Where is his office?" asked Noel.

"Go right up th' street, and on the corner

just beyond the grocery you'll see a yaller house, at least it was yaller once. The doctor lives there."

"Shall I be likely to find him now?"

"I reckon yo' will, Mr. Stranger. If he does anything fo' yo', yo' 'll most likely have toe pull him out o' bed."

Thanking his informer, Noel quickly proceeded and soon found the house of the young doctor, whom the man irreverently had called "Pills."

The wounded young soldier was compelled to rap four times before at last a response was given to his summons. Then, from the window above, he saw protruding the head of a young man, who he concluded was the "journeyman sawbones" of whom he had been informed.

"Is this Dr. Sterritt?" inquired Noel, looking up.

"It is. What might it be that I can do fo' yo' all?"

"I have hurt my eye," explained Noel.

"I shall be down directly. Just step right in, Mr. Stranger, and make yo'self at home."

In response to the invitation, Noel

opened the door, which he found was not locked, and entered the room, which plainly was the office of the young physican.

It was easy for Noel, as he glanced about the disordered room, to believe the report which had been given him concerning the appearance of the young doctor who recently had settled in the place.

In a surprisingly short time, however, Noel heard footsteps on the stairway and was reminded by the sound that the doctor was lame, a fact which had kept him far from the battle-line.

Without any unnecessary words Dr. Sterritt at once proceeded to care for his patient. In response to a few direct questions Noel explained to him how the accident had befallen him.

"There's nothin' serious," said the young doctor, after a brief investigation. "We'll soon have yo' as good as new. Where might yo' be stayin', in town?"

"I'm not staying at all," said Noel. "I'm just passing through."

The young doctor did not respond, and Noel's fears increased as he suspected that the physician was by no means convinced

that he was a person of no consequence. At such a time, with reports prevalent of the dangers from the nearness of Grant's army, a stranger in a little hamlet of necessity must explain who he was and why he was there.

However, Dr. Sterritt apparently was not unduly curious and when at last his patient's eye had been bandaged to his satisfaction, he said, "If yo' all have n't anything else toe do fo' a little while I want yo' toe stand out yere on th' corner."

"But I ought to be going," stammered Noel.

"I reckon yo' ought," said the doctor, "but I don't want yo' all toe miss what's goin' toe happen. Do yo' see that man out there?" he added, pointing as he spoke to a forlorn individual who had been driving a still more forlorn mule attached to a small wagon loaded with vegetables. The wagon had been backed up near the sidewalk and the mule now was unhitched, while the man prepared for his expected sales.

"This is market day," explained the doctor. "Every Saturday mo'nin' befo' th' war, th' whole square used toe be surrounded

with carts. Since th' able-bodied men have gone off toe shoot Yanks, only th' left-overs can carry on th' work. Personally, I don't believe they have any right toe do it."

"Why not?"

"Because, sir, I reckon th' men that are tryin' toe run stores in a place like this in war-time are entitled, sir, toe all the trade they can obtain. Now, Mr. Stranger, I intend toe make life a burden fo' this individual. If yo' 'll look sharp, yo' 'll see that he has a sign stuck up on his wagon and he has printed on it in charcoal: 'Pertaters en' ternups.' Mr. Stranger, will you kindly do a favor fo' me?"

"Certainly."

"Then I wish you would cross the street and go toe that man sellin' his fruit —"

"Fruit? It's not fruit," interrupted Noel with a laugh. The young soldier was feeling better now that his eye had been treated.

"Call it that, sir. Call it that. I want yo' toe go over and ask him if he has any eggs."

"Is that all?" asked Noel.

"Yes, sir. It is all at present, sir."

"That's easy," said Noel, and he at once

departed from the office and crossed the street.

"Mo'nin', Mr. Stranger," called the huckster, as Noel drew near.

"Good-morning," responded Noel. "What have you got to sell?"

"Pertaters en' ternups," replied the farmer, pointing to his sign.

"Got any eggs?" inquired Noel.

"No, I did n't bring none."

As Noel had now completed the directions that had been given him, he at once returned to the office.

"I'm going over toe see the man myself and may invite a few more toe go over a little later," explained the doctor, his eyes twinkling as he spoke. "Yo'll please toe wait right yere for me. There's no harm in yore listenin' toe what is said."

The doctor crossed the street, and hailing the huckster said, "Good-mo'nin'."

"Good-mo'nin'," replied the man.

"What have yo' got toe sell?" inquired the doctor.

"Pertaters en' ternups," responded the huckster, again pointing to his placard.

"Got any eggs?" inquired the doctor.

Glancing testily at the inquirer, the man replied, "Aiggs! Aiggs! No, I ain't got no aiggs," he added in a surly manner.

Soon after the doctor departed, another inquirer approached the man whose vegetables were for sale, "Good-mo'nin'," he said as he drew near.

"Good-mo'nin'," replied the huckster, glancing suspiciously at the newcomer.

"What have yo' got toe sell?"

Without removing his eyes from the possible purchaser the farmer pointed to his sign and said, "Pertaters en' ternups."

"Got any eggs?"

Convinced that the farmer's fists were doubled, Noel laughed when he heard him reply in a shout, "No aiggs! I ain't got no aiggs!"

Scarcely had the inquirer turned away, before a boy approached, carrying a pair of very large baskets on his arms. And such a boy! Later, Noel was told that his weight was two hundred and sixty pounds, although he was less than eighteen years of age.

Dr. Sterritt in describing him said, "He's a boy of eighteen, obese, rubicund, coatless, mouth open, lips that resemble a railroad

embankment, some eyes that are like the heads of pins, and weight two hundred and sixty pounds, sixteen ounces to the pound."

Rolling into the presence of the vender, the fat boy solemnly said, "Good-mo'nin', stranger."

Without responding to the salutation, the huckster pointed to his placard and briefly replied, "Good-mo'nin'."

"What have yo' all got for sale?"

"Pertaters en' ternups."

As the boy prepared to withdraw from the step he spoke in tones that betrayed his disappointment. "Got any eggs?" he asked.

"Aiggs! Aiggs!" repeated the vender. "Aiggs in your baskets! Aiggs!"

The would-be purchaser was gone, however, but an aged man now took his place who slowly approached and said, "Good-mo'nin'."

"Yes," replied the vender, "pertaters en' ternups!"

"No," said the old man shaking his head; "Have yo' —"

"Ternups?" broke in the vender.

"No. Have yo' got any —"

“Aiggs! Aiggs! No, sir, I ain’t got no aiggs!” roared the huckster.

Slowly now a mournful-appearing individual came up and in his most solemn tones, inquired, as he stopped in front of the wagon, “What have yo’ got toe sell, Mr. Stranger?”

The vender now glared at the man as if he was trying to inspect him from head to heels. The inquirer, however, was still very solemn and apparently was anxiously awaiting a reply to his question. There was nothing suspicious in his appearance and the vender at last simply said, “Pertaters en’ ternups.”

The purchaser, leaning forward and ‘peer-ing into the box in the wagon as he spoke, inquired solemnly, “Got any eggs?”

Instantly seizing a potato in one hand and a turnip in the other the vender shouted, as he held them up to view, “Is them aiggs? Kin you see? Em I aiggs? No, sir, I ain’t aiggs! I ain’t got no aiggs and don’t expect to have no aiggs. No, sir!”

By this time Noel was so convulsed with laughter that he had almost forgotten the peril which threatened him. His attention,

however, at the moment was diverted by the approach of another customer across the street.

Stopping in front of the vender the man inquired pleasantly, "What have yo' got toe sell?"

"Hey?" replied the huckster, advancing two steps nearer his inquirer.

"What have yo' got toe sell there?" inquired the man, pointing to the cart as he spoke.

Before he replied the farmer thrust his hand deep into the depths of his trouser pockets and drew forth a huge jack-knife. The blade, though it had been long at one time, had been ground so frequently that it was now approximately only two inches in length. Opening the knife with a jerk and grasping it firmly, the huckster raised it above his head and then slowly said, "Per-taters en' ternups, John, but don't you say aiggs, John, fo' if yo' do I'll sample yore gizzard."

At that moment the young doctor, his face still expressionless, returned to the office and glancing at the scene across the street said to Noel, "I thought maybe it

would be better fo' me toe come back about this time. If there's any carvin' goin' on I ought toe be the man toe do it. Don't yo' think so, Yank?"

CHAPTER XIII

A FIRE HUNT

NOEL CURTIS stared blankly at the young physician. In spite of his efforts at self-control his cheeks flushed as he heard the quietly spoken word which indicated that the young doctor suspected who he was.

Dr. Sterritt apparently enjoyed the confusion of his recent patient and for a brief time was silent.

"Yo' can't get away from it," he laughed. "Yo' 're a Yank and it's written all over yo', toe say nothin' o' shoutin' it from the housetops ev'ry time yo' all speak."

"What are you going to do with me, if what you say is true?"

"That remains to be seen, Mr. Stranger," said the young doctor more seriously. "I reckon th' best thing fo' yo' toe do is toe do nothin'. Don't tell me whether yo' all are in th' army or not. I might suspect why yo' 're down yere, but I'm goin' to give yo' all th' advantage o' my ignorance. Did yo' all

ever hear about th' trick the Yanks tried to play over at Hamlet?"

"What was that?"

"Why, they tried toe steal a railroad train. I have heard that th' Yanks would carry away with them anything they could lift, but stealin' cars sure is th' latest report."

Still unable to control himself thoroughly, Noel's manner betrayed his guilt.

"That's right, Yank," laughed Dr. Sterritt. "Yore actions speak louder than yore words, but don't tell me, then I shan't be beholden o' nobody. If I don't know what yo' all are, I shan't be blamed for what I may do. The trouble is, Yank," he added, as he turned again to Noel, "yo' don't deserve anything but hangin'. Comin' down yere with yore guns and interferin' with peaceable folk, who ask only to be let alone! Yo' don't deserve any more than that! But th' Good Book says that even if yore enemy is hungry it is a good thing toe feed him, and if he's thirsty let him drink, so I'm goin' toe keep yo' all yere in my house a day or two 'til I know more how that eye o' yore's is goin' toe behave."

“You are very kind — ” began Noel.

“Better wait ’til we ’re done with this job befo’ yo’ begin toe thank me. Sometimes I reckon, though, it is safer to applaud a man befo’ he begins than it is to wait for it ’til after he ’s done. I have heard some speakers who did n’t have much room left for applause when they got through. Now, Mr. Stranger, let me explain some more. My advice is fo’ yo’ not toe show yo’self. This yere little hamlet is peaceable-like, but has an uncommon prejudice against anything like a Yank. There are n’t any women-folk in my house, so there won’t be any foolish questions asked you. Uncle Peter looks after the place and he ’s the most discreet darky in five States.”

“You are going to keep me here until my eye is cured?”

“I did n’t say that,” said the doctor lightly. “I ’m goin’ to help yo’; but just as like as not when I have got yore sight restored I may turn yo’ over to th’ proper authorities.”

The expression on the face of the young physician belied any such peril as was implied in his dire threat. And Noel was more

than willing to accept the invitation, even though it came from one who was supposedly his enemy. He was wearied with the excitement and experiences of the recent days and the thought of an opportunity to rest was most welcome. Indeed, in the two days that passed, the young soldier spent much of his time in bed. The rest not only was grateful, but danger of discovery was also avoided in this manner.

When the third day arrived, Dr. Sterritt said to his patient, "I reckon yo' all are about right again, Yank. Now, what do yo' all propose toe do?"

"If I don't tell you," said Noel with a smile, "you won't have any false information."

"Right yo' are, Mr. Stranger, so don't tell me a word, but if yo' all are open toe suggestions I have one or two I would like toe make."

"I shall be glad to have them."

"I don't know that yo' 're one of the men who tried toe steal th' railway-cars, locomotive, track, and everything. I'm not even a-hintin' at it. I do know that most of those Yanks have been caught. The repo't is that

two or three are still lyin' 'round loose somewhere in th' county."

The young doctor was silent a brief time, and then, almost as if he was speaking to himself, he continued, "About a mile up th' pike there's a man named Samuel Sikes. He is n't very much of a man. He pretends to cultivate a little spot of ground, but th' most of his time he's huntin'. Agriculture does n't seem to appeal toe him very strongly. He would rather carry a shotgun than use a hoe, and he would rather shoot a coon than raise potatoes. Yo' would know he was a hunter by the signs he has hangin' out 'round his place. Up on th' gable end o' his log house he has a pair of antlers. They represent the proudest moment in Sam's life. If yo' get inside the house yo' 'll find ten or a dozen long fishin' poles stuck up 'round th' chimney. Hangin' 'round th' unchinked walls yo' 'll find a good many coonskins dryin' out. Beyond all that, he has a pack of 'bout twenty low-down houn' dawgs that come at full cry at every man that passes Sam's house. He's got five or six tallow-faced little responsibilities 'round the place, and his wife, — well, all I can

say, Mr. Stranger, is that I wonder where Sam got her. He shore did have fisherman's luck the day he found her. Speakin' o' fisherman's luck, though, she herself has somethin' toe say 'bout that. Sometimes when it rains and there is n't as much as a squirrel or a horney-head to eat in the house, she makes remarks toe her spouse. About all Sam can say is that he's 'bleeged toe do the best he kin to get meat for her and the childer.' "

Noel was somewhat interested in the narrative of the doctor, although, as yet, he did not see how the tale applied to him.

"If Sam has a hobby, it's th' fire hunt," resumed the doctor.

"The what?"

"Fire hunt. Don't yo' all know what that is?"

"I never heard of it."

"Why, it's a pan full of tar, pitch, and turpentine. The hunter carries it on a stick, and when the stuff is blazin', Sam says, 'it's slick to shine in a buck's eyes.' Some time ago th' legislature passed an act prohibiting fire huntin', but that did n't stop Sam. He declared th' law was 'unconstitootional and

ag'in' reason.' Sam came yere one night and told me I'd got toe go out on a fire hunt with him. He rode up yere in front o' my house and his mule did his best to crop the shrub-b'ry that was growin' by my door. Looking at his beast Sam said, 'Jes' look at him now, will yo'! Come with me and I'll show yo' how to shine the eyes of a buck.' Sam had been carrying on his left shoulder his blazing fire pan, on his right shoulder he held his musket, and in his right hand he had th' reins. It was a bit difficult, you see, for him toe keep th' mule in a proper position so that he would n't eat up my vines. I was just about toe tell Sam that I would go with him, that bein' the easiest way out o' th' trouble, when the mule suddenly began toe sidle up toward th' house and began toe sing. Ever hear a mule sing? It is n't much of a tune, — there's only one part toe it, — but let me tell yo' that when Sam Sikes's mule got started there was n't another animal this side of Mason and Dixon's line that was his equal. 'Come, doctor, get your gun,' Sam said. Then he turned 'round and yelled, 'Will yo' hold up your head, yo' 'bominable fool! Let's take a little run. It

will do yo' good. Whoa! Whoa! That's right, jes' look at him!' It was a little difficult for me to decide just when Sam was talkin' toe me and when he was talkin' toe his mule, but I finally told him I'd go.

"Just as I said I would, th' mule let out the loudest bray that I evah heard and when I turned toe look at him, his heels were high in the air and Sam was clinging to th' animal's neck and th' fire pan was scattering in every direction. That mule of Sam Sikes's yelled and reared, and still Sam hung on toe his neck, shoutin' toe him, 'Whoa! Whoa! Look at him! Now, will yo' mind!' The mule did n't 'mind,' and just then backed toe that low fence yonder, which shuts in my small flower garden. Over the fence tumbled th' mule, Sam Sikes, pan, gun, and everything, all together. When Sam at last worked himself free he found that his saddle blanket was on fire and that was th' cause o' all th' trouble. 'I thought I smelt somethin' burnin',' said Sam solemnly, and he proceeded to deliver a lecture to th' innocent cause of his troubles. Well, th' up-shot of it was that I could n't say no toe Sam, after th' treat he had given me.

“Yo’ all just can’t picture toe yourself, Mr. Stranger, what that long-legged, gaunt, tow-headed Sam Sikes, straddled on th’ back o’ that kickin’ mule, looked like. I jes’ could n’t say no toe him after that, sir, so I had toe go with him. When we got into th’ woods Sam was sure he could show me how toe shine the eyes of a buck. We crept on among th’ trees, and by and by Sam suddenly stopped and said, ‘There’s eyes, yonder, whoppers they is, too! Now, hold still, doctor.’ I was almost as excited as Sam. I heard th’ click of his lock and then there was a second of silence before his musket flashed out with a thunderin’ report and at th’ same moment there was a squeal so loud that it would make the Yanks weep to hear it, and there was another noise like the snap-pin’ o’ dried leaves. ‘Stars and Bars,’ yelled Sam, as he dropped his gun and ran toe th’ spot. ‘I’ve shot Ole Blaze.’ Old Blaze, you see, was th’ name o’ his mule. I found some good excuse fo’ startin’ back with him. Of co’sse I felt sorry fo’ Sam, but I reckon he would need toe save all his courage and explainin’ fo’ his remarks toe Mrs. S., after he got home. I never could get him toe talk

about it afterward, except toe say that ‘Polly’ — that’s his wife — ‘says she’ll nevah let me hear th’ last o’ that creter toe th’ last day I live.’ Sam says that was th’ worst trick he ever had played on him, except choppin’ a coon-tree down across the nest of a hen that his wife had set. He says Polly sometimes speaks o’ one and then refers toe the other in a manner that brings tears toe th’ eyes o’ th’ hunter.

“Now, the point of all that I’m tellin’ yo’ is this,” continued the doctor. “Sam Sikes is plannin’ toe have another fire-pan hunt. He’s thinkin’ o’ startin’ to-night. Yore eye is pretty much all right again and I reckon as how yo’ all might be willin’ toe go with him on his hunt.”

CHAPTER XIV

SNAKE-BITE

THE young sharpshooter, looking keenly into the eyes of the doctor, was quickly aware that, in spite of the man's strong sympathies for the Confederate cause, his heart was too tender to permit him to assist in the capture of one of the unfortunate boys in blue, even though he was an enemy. Noel suspected also that the doctor was taking this method of suggesting a plan of escape from the region.

Aroused thoroughly to the necessity which confronted him, Noel quickly decided to follow the implied suggestion of the friendly doctor. "There's nothing I would like more just now," he said, "than to have a fire hunt with your friend."

"That's good," said the doctor cordially. "Now, there's no knowin' how long Sam Sikes may be gone, nor how far he may take yo', befo' he finds the buck he is lookin' fo'."

"That's all right," said Noel seriously.

"And it's quite likely," continued the

doctor, "that I may not see you again. Leastwise, not very soon."

"That may be true. I certainly hope it will be, though I have appreciated the help you have given me. How much do I owe you now? If I have enough money I want to pay my debts before I go hunting."

"Yo' all don't owe me anything," said the doctor, shaking his head slowly as he spoke. "Maybe, after the war, we can square accounts, but just now I would n't even charge a Yank fo' fixin' up his eye th' way I did yours."

Noel laughed and again thanked his physician. He decided quickly to retain the little money he had left, feeling confident that if he should escape to the Union lines, it would be a comparatively easy matter to arrange for the payment of the services which had been given him.

Evening was approaching when at last Sam Sikes came to the doctor's house. The description which Noel already had received of the hunter had not been exaggerated. Samuel, long, gawky, and sandy-haired, was almost the personification of the lack of capacity. His mouth seldom was closed, his

jaw was stained with tobacco juice, and the scraggly hair of his head was long, while the thin beard he wore was an evidence of his unwillingness to enter even into the labor of shaving.

With Sam also came his pack of dogs. There were at least a dozen of the snarling curs in the pack, and when their master stopped in front of the doctor's house, his canine followers immediately began to bestow their attentions upon one another.

"It beats all," said Sam disconsolately, "how them dawgs does like toe fight. Sometimes in the mo'nin' when I hear 'em snarlin' and snappin', I go out to see what th' rumpus is all 'bout, and I can't find much but jes' one great bunch of dogs, heads and legs and tails stickin' out ev'ry which way. I jes' take a club an' strike hard and promisc'ous-like, an' pretty soon order is restored. What is it 'bout this fire hunt, doctor?" he added, speaking in tones that were somewhat more animated.

"I have a friend here who wants to go with you," said the doctor, indicating Noel as he spoke.

"Any friend of yore's, doctor, is mos'

welcome. Do yo' all have any pa'ticular time yo' might want toe sta't?"

"Right now," said the doctor promptly. "I want yo' toe make a good hunt of it and don't stop this side of Richmond, if yo' don't get what yo' start out fo'."

"That suits me all right," said Sam.

"I got a kit with some bacon and other things I have had my boy get ready for you, Sam. If yo' carry th' guns and look after th' dogs, I reckon my friend here will be willin' toe carry th' kit."

Noel promptly declared his willingness to assist in any way in his power, and just as the sun sank below the western horizon the hunter and his companion departed from the little village.

"I reckon I'll take th' straight co'se toe th' swamp," suggested Sam when they arrived at the outskirts of the village. "That 'll save goin' home. Polly might have some remarks toe make, as I did n't quite finish up hoein' the sweet pertaters."

"Who's Polly?" inquired Noel.

"Polly? Why, she's my wife. I thought ever'body in Creation knew that. She's got a tongue more 'n a yard long and when she

starts toe gettin' it into action there's no livin' with her."

Noel laughed, but did not refer to his thought that Polly might have an excuse for her elongated lingual instrument of torture. What effect it had had upon Sam was not manifest in any way, however, except for his manifest desire to escape from its presence.

"Yas," continued Sam. "Polly's a great 'un. So is her brother, John Borum. He's the greatest rail-rode man south o' Mason an' Dixon's line."

"What do you mean?" inquired Noel.

"I mean he's rode on a rail more frequently than any o' my acquaintances."

"Does he do it from choice?" inquired Noel soberly.

"Naw! The Cou't of Iniquity usually decides that that is th' best fo' him."

"The Court of what?"

"The Cou't of Iniquity," replied Sam. "That's what they call the cou't when about a dozen men get together and solemnly decide that the time has arrove fo' John toe be rid some more."

"What do they do it for?"

“I’m sorry toe say,” said Sam, “that my brother-in-law is somewhat given toe drink. When he gets somewhat under the influence o’ liquor, he’s desp’rate, an’ th’ noisiest man in seven counties. Th’ other day he fired a ho’s-e-pistol at a small boy, but th’ little fellow returned th’ compliment by pepperin’ John with a charge o’ shot. The parties was so far apart that the’ was n’t any remarkable serious damage done, but the Cou’t of Iniquity decided it was high time that something was did. John said he’d be dad-fetched if he would be rid on a rail any more. He went into Mr. Harley’s and bought three pounds of powder and tied it up in a silk pocket handkerchief. ’T was gettin’ evenin’, and John, with his handkerchief under his arm, walked into th’ grocery store of Monsieur Crapeau. There he bought a cigar and leaning up against the wall began to smoke. Pretty soon ’long comes the Cou’t of Iniquity. John begins toe talk as if he was speakin’ toe himself, ‘If yo’ all come tryin’ that trick, yo’ ’ll git marked up worse than yo’ ever was afore. Yo’ jes’ better don’t bother with this chile.’ When the Cou’t came up, John waved his cigar ’round in th’

air promisc'us until he brought it close to his bag o' powder and he said cheerfully if they come any nearer he'd touch th' powder off with his cigar. 'Yo' all let me 'lone, then,' he said; 'if yo' don't I'll blow all hands up, and myself too afore I'll be rid on a rail some mo'.' 'Gather him up, boys,' said the judge. 'The sentence o' the law must be executed.' As the Cou't started, the little Frenchman began to shout, 'Murdare! Get out o' my house, sare! Begone! Before one little minute you shall not blow up all my propertee.' 'It does n't matter very much toe me,' said John, 'but I'd jes' as leave be blown into everlastin' shoestrings as to be rid on a rail.'"

"Did the Court ride him?" laughed Noel.

"No, sir. The Cou't turned 'round and went back. They are two of a kind," continued Sam. "I mean John and my wife. Polly is 'fraid o' snakes. Now, I don't pay no attention toe snakes any more'n I do toe b'ars, 'specially a rattlesnake, 'cause you see that varment always rattles his tail befo' he strikes and that gives yo' a chance toe git out'n th' way. But Polly, she don't feel like that. She went out one day and was

leanin' over pickin' up chips, and the first thing she knew she had come on th' whoppinest, rustiest, yaller moccasin that ever yo' heard of. Polly's kinder deaf, — I reckon she's like the man what works in a sawmill. She's heard her own clack so much it kinder shet off th' power toe hear anythin' else. Well, she did n't hear th' moccasin begin to puff and blow, and th' first thing she knowed he bit her, slap. You ought toe seen that old gal, how she fell down and wallered and tumbled about and hollered and tried to sing a sam. You would have thought th' very yearth was comin' toe a end. Then she begun hollerin' for help. Pretty quick somebody heard her and fed her some whiskey. D'rectly she started toe come toe herself, but when Miss Lemay sez, 'Polly! Polly Sikes; what's hurt yo'?' 'Snake-bit,' sez Polly. 'Where 'bouts,' sez Miss Lemay. 'Never yo' mind,' sez she, 'jes' snake-bit.'

“'Bout that time I come home. I wish I may never see Christmas if I did n't laff and holler so yo' all could 'a' heard me mos' half a mile. I never laffed so much since John Potter got on a b'ar's back without no knife and rode him 'round like a ho'se and was too

scared toe get off. I give yo' my word I jes' fairly rolled."

"Because your wife had been bitten by a moccasin?" inquired Noel.

"No, not a bit," replied Sam. "When I got there I found a great long string tied 'round a braid o' false hair Polly had been savin' up money for mos' a year toe buy. She had th' braid on when she was out pickin' up chips, with some kind of a sharp new-fangled hairpin fast in it. Seems th' braid worked loose and Polly was barefoot at th' time and she stepped on th' hairpin, and then looked down and saw this long braid right at her feet, and then she jes' hollered because she was sure it was a moccasin. She did n't seem to have any other idee. I thought I'd have some fun with her, so I sez to her, 'Polly, I'll give you the best bunch of bristles I've got if yo' 'll tell me how not toe get skeered of a snake.'"

"Did she tell you?" inquired Noel.

"She did n't say nary a word, she jes' turned 'round and took me kerbim right 'tween th' eyes. I tell yo' it made me see stars, snakes, dragons, and a few other like things. I have n't said snake to her sence."

“You’re a wise man.”

The loquacious hunter had led the way over a path that to Noel seemed to be well trodden. He had no conception of where he was going. As the darkness deepened, his fears somewhat returned as he recalled that he had nothing upon which to rely except the implied assurance of Dr. Sterritt that Sam was to be trusted.

“I reckon it is n’t very far ahead,” suggested Sam, after a brief silence.

“What is n’t very far ahead?” inquired Noel.

“Jes’ yo’ wait and yo’ all will see right soon.”

CHAPTER XV

A TUNNEL

MEANWHILE Frank Curtis and Dennis O'Hara were having experiences even more trying than those which had befallen Noel.

In Andersonville Prison only private soldiers were confined. The Union officers had been sent to Macon and other camps. Partly for this reason, partly because of the inability of the Confederate forces to secure sufficient food, and partly also because of the bitterness of Major Wirz, who at the time was in command at Andersonville, the lot of the unfortunate prisoners daily became worse.

The numbers within the stockade steadily increased, but the provisions, however, did not increase correspondingly; and the filth of the place, where the little streams that flowed through the camp were polluted from without as well as from within, increased the cases of illness until the roll of dead became appalling.

The prisoners who were sick oftentimes were the helpless prey of other prisoners who were

somewhat stronger. Food was brutally taken from them by certain of their fellow-prisoners. Cooking utensils were seized and even the possessor of a blanket or a sharer in a "shebang" was unable to protect his own property, unless he chanced to be as strong as the parties that attacked him.

These experiences had been a part of the life of Frank and Dennis since they had been brought inside the stockade. Uncle Sim, so called, although, as a matter of fact, he was only thirty-five years of age, had strongly added to the depression of Frank. The man had been a prisoner a long time and his five different attempts to escape, as has been said, all had proved futile. His sufferings from hunger, disease, and homesickness had so aged him that, in spite of the fact that he was not an old man, his appearance was that of one over whom many years had passed. Indeed, the expression "Uncle Sim" seemed not in the least inappropriate.

And now word was brought to Frank and Dennis that the man, who had been a frequent and not unwelcome visitor at their "shebang," was dead.

Without a word the two young soldiers arose at the announcement of John Oatman and followed him as he led the way toward the "dead house."

"Mebbe you had better not go in here," suggested Dennis to Frank. "I'm thinkin' it won't make you feel any stronger."

"I'm going in," retorted Frank.

Without a word the two prisoners followed their leader within the rude building, which was commonly known as the "dead house."

Here, on canvas stretchers were the bodies of the unfortunate prisoners who had died the preceding night. It was impossible to provide suitable means of burial and the sight of the rows of bodies was depressing.

Uncle Sim's emaciated form was lying motionless on a near-by stretcher. The thin and worn hands were folded across his chest and the body had been kept in position by tying his great toes together. This was the only means used for "laying out" the dead.

The visitors did not long remain within the gruesome place and when they withdrew, Dennis said cheerily, "I always knew Uncle Sim was a man of his word, but I never

believed he would live up to what he said yesterday."

"He's better off, I think," said Frank gloomily.

"That depends," said Dennis. "Still, Uncle Sim was a pretty dacint sort of a chap, though I don't mesilf jest like his way o' leaving Andersonville. I'm goin' to find some better way."

Somewhat to the surprise of the young Irishman, Frank apparently was not cast down by the death of Uncle Sim. Indeed his spirits seemed to rise somewhat when the following day there came a wild report from John Oatman that Uncle Sim had not been dead at all. He had shammed death, and had been carried from the dead house outside the prison walls to be left with other bodies until morning, when the final task for the dead would be finished. When morning came, however, Uncle Sim had disappeared.

"Indade," said Dennis, when he heard the stirring report, "and Uncle Sim was dead right, and that's no pun. If he could n't get away from the dogs he had a right to try some other way."

"They will make sure after this," suggested Frank, "that the dead are really dead before they leave them."

"It won't be much of a task, I'm thinkin'," said Dennis, "for most o' the poor fellows; but if Uncle Sim can sham dead and not even move when they tickle his toes, I guess there's some chance for th' rest of us, and I have got me scheme now, me boy."

"What is it?" inquired Frank eagerly, as he and John Oatman drew closer to Dennis.

"We'll begin a tunnel to-night."

"Where?" inquired Frank.

"You know the old well near our 'she-bang'? Well, it's dry now, and we can drop down into the bottom of the well and begin our work there."

"How are we going to dig?"

"With these," said Dennis, taking from his pocket two halves of a canteen. He had succeeded in retaining his canteen in spite of repeated efforts to steal it. Now he had split it into two parts, each of which had sharp edges and in shape was not unlike a clam-shell.

"That will work well," said John, critically examining the improvised implements.

"Sure, it will," said Dennis, "and so will the man behind it."

"But what shall we do with the dirt we dig up?" inquired Frank.

"One man will have to stand guard and the other be in the well ready to scoop the dirt into a pail as fast as it is pushed back to him. We'll take turns digging and each man will have to serve about a half an hour before his relief. That will divide the work up and we can put in half the night —"

"Yes, but what are we going to do with the dirt after we get it out?" persisted Frank.

"Carry it down to the swamp and throw it into the water," explained Dennis.

"When can we begin?" inquired Frank, who now was eager for the attempt to be made.

"Wait until after dark," said Dennis, delighted at the change in his comrade.

Darkness had fallen over the camp and the frugal supper had been eaten when the three young prisoners began their attempt to tunnel their way outside the stockade.

Dennis was the first to serve his turn as a digger. With the half-canteen he made

rapid progress in the soft soil. As fast as he loosened the earth he pushed it behind him, where it was scooped into the one pail the boys possessed and passed by Frank to John who was waiting outside.

By the time the pail was returned, so rapidly had Dennis digged, there was sufficient earth to fill it once more. In this manner all three were kept busy, although the task of the man who was burrowing his way beneath the ground was the most difficult of all.

After Dennis had digged his way in several feet, the air became close and perspiration started from every pore in his body. Doggedly he held to his task, however, and when what was estimated as a half-hour had passed, he was summoned from his labors, and Frank insisted upon taking his place in the tunnel.

For a few minutes Frank labored desperately, but his strength was soon exhausted and he too was compelled to rest.

Resuming his task he decided that he must use the utmost care to husband his strength. In the soft soil, however, his progress was not slow and when his half-hour

had been completed and John took his place in the hole, twelve feet or more had been excavated.

At the expiration of six hours the task was abandoned for a time and all trace of their labor was carefully removed. If the excavation was to be completed, all three boys were aware that they must husband their strength for the task was becoming more difficult as the tunnel increased in length.

Carefully they had computed the distance which they thought they must make before they would be safely outside the stockade. As nearly as they were able to estimate, they concluded that at least one hundred feet must be digged. It is true the tunnel was only a little larger than the body of a man, but even then the task of digging and removing the soft earth was not slight.

The following day Frank slept part of the time, much to the delight of Dennis. His unusual exertions had wearied the boy, whose strength now, as we know, was slight. However, the delight of the young Irish soldier was especially great over the fact that his comrade manifested such keen interest in the project. Anything almost was

better than the black despair which at times had settled upon the young soldier.

When darkness fell again, the labor was resumed. And so eager was every one that when the allotted six hours had passed, they were convinced that at least one third of the required distance had been covered. And as yet there were no signs that their attempt had been discovered. Indeed, it was commonly whispered about the camp that the Confederate guards were not at all averse to attempts by the prisoners to escape. A furlough of thirty days was granted, or so it was currently reported among the prisoners, to any guard who shot a Union soldier either while he was attempting to escape, or while he was crossing the "dead line." The latter was a line drawn about twenty feet from the stockade and the prisoners were warned that to cross it or even to approach it meant instant death. Already not a few of the prisoners had been shot in this manner.

A few of the guards stationed in the boxes were little more than boys. They had heard so much talk about shooting escaping prisoners that the act was looked upon by them somewhat in the light of good sport.

Several days elapsed and the tunnel steadily increased in length. All three were to save out of their scanty provisions sufficient food to last two days. They planned to carry this with them through the tunnel and to use it in their flight for freedom. The one who was in advance was to dig his way to the surface of the ground and be prepared to assist his comrades to make their exits quickly.

“We’ll try it to-night,” declared Dennis.

His word was followed and as near midnight as the boys were able to estimate, all three crawled into the tunnel, Dennis with his precious half-canteen leading the way.

CHAPTER XVI

TATTOOING A FELLOW-PRISONER

CAUTIOUSLY the three young prisoners crawled through the narrow tunnel. At the suggestion of Dennis they were creeping several yards distant from one another. This action was taken because when they should come to the end of the excavation, it would be necessary for Dennis to dig through the few remaining inches of soil and he might be compelled to throw a part at least of the dirt into the tunnel behind him.

At last Dennis arrived at the end of the tunnel. A low whistle informed his companions of the fact, and then without delay the young Irishman began cautiously to work his way toward the surface of the ground.

Although Dennis was doing his utmost to work quietly, he was only partly successful in restraining his excitement, while Frank and John were almost unable to control themselves. Outside the stockade might be freedom, or they might also find themselves

confronted by guards or immediately chased by bloodhounds.

To Frank it seemed as if hours had elapsed and still no word was heard from his comrade in advance of him. Slowly the moments passed, and John Oatman, unable longer to remain motionless, crawled forward until he felt the feet of Frank before him.

‘At last the long waiting was ended, but in no such manner as the three desperate young prisoners had hoped.

There was a sharp call from Dennis, “Go back! Go back, every one o’ yez! Don’t come on! Go back!”

Not another word was spoken and Dennis was not to be seen. In the darkness of the narrow tunnel Frank scarcely knew what to do. It was plain that Dennis had been alarmed, although he had not explained what had frightened him.

“Go on back. Crawl backward,” Frank called quickly to John. The young soldier had decided that the alarm was of such a character that the word of Dennis must be followed, and if they were to obey at all, then they must act promptly. Perhaps already their tunnel had been discovered.

Accordingly, the two boys began to move backward as rapidly as they were able to go. So alarmed were they that both were crawling swiftly and they arrived at the entrance sooner than either expected.

Hastily making their way out of the well, they waited anxiously until Dennis appeared.

"What is it? What is it?" whispered Frank excitedly as he at once approached his friend.

"Come and see for yourself," said Dennis. "Don't look as if you saw anything, but just keep your two eyes wide open. 'T is fortunate I am that I was n't caught."

"But what are you doing inside the stockade?" demanded John.

"Faith," said Dennis, "and 't is not far outside I've been at all. Look at that, will you?" As he spoke he pointed to a hole which had recently been filled up, although it still presented the appearance of the ground having given way.

"What is that?" inquired Frank.

"Faith, and that's the end of our tunnel."

"What!"

"'T is that same."

"Why, it is n't twelve feet from where we started."

"No more it is n't."

"But we must have gone one hundred feet."

"Sure we did. But it was n't one hundred feet in a straight line."

"Do you mean that that is the end of the tunnel which we started from the well?" demanded Frank.

"Yes, sir. 'T is just like I'm tellin' you."

"How do you account for it? How could we have made such a mistake?"

"Why, if you two boys were like meself," explained Dennis, "you did your diggin' with your right hands."

"Yes, that's it," said both the boys together.

"Very well, then, you worked harder with your right hand than you knew, and naturally you kept veering off so that without your knowing what you were doing, you made almost a circle and came back to within twelve feet of the place where you started."

All three were silent a moment, and then Frank said quickly, "Do you think any

one saw you when you came out of that hole?"

"I don't think so," answered Dennis.

"Then there will be no great damage done and we'll try it again. This time we'll do more work with our left hands. I suppose because the left hand is n't as strong as the right, we shan't be likely then to turn too far the other way."

"Sure we won't," said Dennis glibly, delighted to find Frank's courage and determination more in evidence than they had been since the boys had entered the prison.

"We'll begin it to-night," said Frank.

"Sure we will," said Dennis.

It was not long before a new tunnel was begun. By using their left hands part of the time, as Frank had suggested, they were confident that they would be able to make their excavations more successfully. There were difficulties, however, in finding out whether or not they were moving in a reasonably straight line.

However, after three nights had passed, and all three had labored hard and steadily, they decided that they must be somewhere near the stockade. As the posts, of which

the stockade was formed, were sunk several feet into the ground, it would be necessary to excavate beneath the ends of these timbers. The hope of the boys was increased by the fact that they had now come directly into contact with the sunken posts. Their line, therefore, had been reasonably straight and Frank's plan had been successful in enabling them to avoid the mistake of their former attempt.

One night more and they would be able to carry their excavations beyond the high fence which shut in the prisoners at Andersonville!

The following morning, however, the hopes of all three once more were dashed to the ground. A young officer, accompanied by one of the prisoners, came directly to the "shebang" occupied by Dennis and Frank and without a word began to investigate.

With a shovel he struck the ground in various places. Dennis and Frank, greatly alarmed, watched the man and their worst fears were confirmed when after a few minutes had elapsed the efforts of the officer were successful and he broke through the surface of the ground, revealing the tunnel

which the three young prisoners with so much labor had nearly completed.

"I reckon there won't be anybody usin' that right soon," laughed the young officer, not ill-naturedly. "Quite likely I might try toe get out if I was in a Yankee prison like this. I am not blamin' yo' all, boys, so much, and I don't want toe know whose tunnel this is; but it 'll never be used. I can make yo' sure o' that fact right now."

Until the officer departed he made no further investigations and had not even asked for the names of the men who had made the tunnel.

The man who had accompanied him, however, hastened from the place as if he were fearful that his presence would be unwelcome. Nor was he mistaken. An hour afterward John Oatman joined the boys and before he spoke it was manifest that he had brought news of importance.

"Well, what is it?" inquired Dennis.

"There's a spy in the camp," whispered John.

"Indade and that's no news. He's been here with one of the Johnnies who has found our tunnel."

"The spy told him about it."

"How did you know?"

"The story is all around the prison. This fellow went to the guard and told him that if he would give him a plug of tobacco he would tell him of something going on in the prison that would be of great interest to him. It seems they struck a bargain and I suspect this is the result of it."

As he spoke John glanced ruefully at the broken surface of the tunnel and the earth which had fallen in, thereby blocking the escape of any one.

"He will wish," said Dennis angrily, "that he never had asked the guard for tobacco. He's a traitor, that's what he is!"

"And he will be treated as such," said John savagely. "We suspect that he is one of the Raiders."

John's reference was to a band of lawless men among the prisoners who were commonly called by the name by which he had referred to them. They were made up of the most reckless men in the camp, having come from the slums of the great cities, and were banded together for the purpose of

seizing the food or robbing the weaker men of their possessions. There were some, whom Frank and Dennis knew personally, who had been the fortunate owners of blankets and cooking utensils when they had first been brought to Andersonville. These possessions, however, had been seized by the marauders who now were known throughout the prison as the Raiders.

Recently, too, there had been formed a band of men who called themselves the Regulators. Their purpose was to hinder the raiders in their attacks and to protect the weak against their assaults.

The following day, late in the afternoon, Dennis and Frank were summoned to a retired part of the prison grounds. When they arrived they discovered an assembly of a half-dozen men, in the midst of whom was the man who was suspected of being a spy and of informing the officer concerning the tunnel which Dennis and his friends were digging. How he had obtained his information it was impossible for the boys to understand, but that he had betrayed them in their attempt there was slight question in their minds.

Indeed, one of the leaders of the Regulators, approaching the place where the three boys were standing, said, "We understand that this man told the guard about the tunnel you were digging."

"Yes, sir," said Dennis.

"We don't know that," said Frank, "but he was with the officer when he filled in our tunnel."

"Exactly," said the man who had spoken to them. "This is not the first case we have had and we're going to make an example of this man."

The prisoner now was bound securely, a cloth was tied about his mouth, and he was then thrown upon his back. At once a burly man, selected for this task, as Frank afterward was informed, because at one time he had been in the navy, now approached and at once began to tattoo the forehead of the helpless victim. Despite the efforts of the captive to escape, the work was steadily continued until at last a large "T" had been pricked in the skin of his forehead and the markings were colored in such a way that the brand would of necessity be borne as long as the man lived.

The angry prisoners were prepared to carry their vengeance still further, but their efforts were interrupted by a low warning of Dennis as he called sharply, "Scatter, men! Scatter! Here comes the guard!"

It was speedily discovered that the guards of the prison had been doubled and a detachment was waiting to disperse the assembly of prisoners.

Without delaying for the order to be given, the men hastily departed from the spot, having first set free the victim of their vengeance.

As long as he lived the spy would be compelled to bear on his face the brand of his treachery. Nor was this the end of the experiences which Dennis and Frank were to have with the man who had betrayed them.

The following day, John Oatman, who for some reason preferred to be with the two boys rather than with the men in his own mess, came to their "shebang" with the startling information that the spy had succeeded in arousing the Raiders who were about to come in a body and visit their wrath upon those who had branded one of their faithful members.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLE OF THE RAIDERS AND REGULATORS

IN the various parts of the prison, at almost any hour of the day or night, the cry might be heard, "Raiders! Raiders!" Whenever the cry arose, an observer would see a crowd of men fighting with fists and feet, clubs, spades, or any utensils that they could easily secure. At times the Raiders were able to gather four or five hundred men at any special point of attack. Their opponents, this time being unorganized, were unable to contend successfully with the desperate and reckless men.

Fortunately the attack which John Oatman had prophesied, for some reason was not made. The cause of the lack of action was not fully known at the time, but the report served to increase the zeal of the Regulators. They actually began a canvass of the prison for new members, and succeeded in enrolling many who previously

had taken no active part in the life among the prisoners at Andersonville.

At this time there were at least 25,000 boys and young men confined within the stockade. At best many of these were not too mindful of control. Practically there was no form of government among the prisoners. The Confederates did not attempt to maintain order in the prison. All their energies were centered in the means to prevent the escape of any of the unfortunate men. As long as the prisoners remained within the stockade, the guards cared little as to what they did. Indeed, the fact of the riots sometimes was quoted as evidence of the "depraved state of the Yankees."

Another element which tended also to do away with order was the fact that all the prisoners at Andersonville were enlisted men. It is true there were a few sergeants among the numbers, but their stripes did not carry any weight of authority. Because of this condition there were no leaders by virtue of their official position. It was simply a revival of the time when those who could show greater strength ruled all those who were weaker. Besides, a great part of the body

consisted of young men who only recently had been sent to the camp. Every one of these was hopeful that within a few days either he would be able to escape from the place or would be exchanged. Aside from the problem of food and shelter, the two chief topics of conversation were the time when orders for exchange of prisoners should be received, or the place or the plans which were being formed for escaping from the stockade.

"I have been thinkin' over the matter," said Dennis to Frank and John the day following the branding of the traitor, "and I think I have found out the reason why the Raiders are so strong."

"What is it?" inquired Frank, whose interest in the life of the camp now was much more manifest than in the early days of his imprisonment.

"Because they are always organized and it is hard to get enough men to stand against them to whip them. They have always won out so far, and I think half the camp is afraid to take any stand because they have not been beaten."

"That may be so," said Frank, "but still

something ought to be done. I think the Regulators now are in shape to make some kind of a respectable stand."

"To be sure they are," said Dennis quickly. "Do you know what they call us?"

"No, what do they call us?"

"Plymouth Pilgrims."

"That's a good name," said John with a smile. "It's about as good a fit as the name that has been given to the Raiders."

"What's that?" asked Dennis.

"Why, there are a good many of the men who call them the 'N'Yaarkers.' It seems the leaders are all said to come from the Bowery or some other hard street in New York."

"Yes," said Frank bitterly, "they are all jail-birds or burglars or bounty-jumpers. At least that's what is said."

"They tried to be bounty-jumpers, you mean," laughed Dennis. "I'm told that some of them were whipped into line when they tried to run away with their thousand-dollar bounties. I am thinkin' that a good many of them would rather be in here, than standin' up with a gun in their hands, facin' the Johnnies."

Despite the talk of the boys, conditions in the prison steadily became worse. The daring and the activities of the Raiders increased until finally there was one foray more bitter and violent than any that had preceded it. The Raiders by some means had learned that one of the prisoners had a few dollars in his possession. By making a rush upon him they robbed him of his money, although their attempt was not successful until they first had knocked the unfortunate man down and cut him severely with a razor.

Dennis was one of the strongest men in the entire assembly of the prisoners. Indeed, his physical prowess was so pronounced that as yet he had not been called upon to demonstrate his strength. He was a big-hearted, genial, generous Irish boy, who did not fall into trouble on his own account. There were many stories current of his marvelous strength and of the power which he still held, although the life at Andersonville naturally had drawn heavily upon him.

Meanwhile the organization of the Regulators was steadily adding to its numbers. The utmost secrecy was used in the efforts of the leaders, although, in spite of this fact,

reports of the plans that were being formed somehow spread among the prisoners.

At last it was believed that the time had arrived when definite action might be taken.

Acting upon his own judgment, Dennis had sought and obtained an interview with Major Wirz, who was in command of the Confederate guard. Among all the men who had held this position Wirz was the one most universally detested. Indeed, the hatred of the prisoners for the man was so great that the commander oftentimes was afraid to come within the stockade.

"Yes, sir," said Dennis, relating the story of his interview with the major, "I went to see him and he is n't so bad at all. I told him that we was goin' to regulate some of these Raiders who were stealin' and worse, and he told me to go ahead."

"He did?" demanded Frank in surprise.

"Yes, sir, that's what he said. 'Go right ahead.' I guess I happened to find him in good humor; and not only did he tell me to go ahead, but he said that we might have the enclosure at the North Gate to shut our prisoners in."

"I wonder," said John, "if he would give

the same place to the Raiders if we did not succeed in regulating them."

"Don't you be afraid of that," said Denis confidently. "There is n't goin' to be any place for prisoners taken by the Raiders."

"That's what I hope," said Frank seriously; "but they are desperate men and we are n't going to break up the gang without having some trouble."

At last the time drew near when the attempt of the Regulators was to be made. There had been various rumors throughout the camp that something unusual was about to occur. Even the guards had been doubled. Every box along the top of the stockade now held a double quota of armed men. Apparently, in spite of the promise which Major Wirz had given, the commander had become alarmed and was fearful that more than a mere "regulation" of the lawless element among the prisoners was to be attempted.

As we know, the stockade at Andersonville enclosed two side hills, between which there was a small valley and a sluggish stream. On one side of this valley the Raiders had their headquarters, while the Regu-

lators were to assemble on the opposite hill. The central place of the N'Yaarkers was known as the "big tent." From this place, on the night preceding the attack there came the sounds of noisy singing and drunken revelry. It was not known until afterward that several canteens of cheap whiskey, made from sorghum, had been smuggled into the prison by some of the reckless men and the Raiders consequently were hilarious.

"Just listen to the sounds, will you?" said Dennis.

Across the yard came the words of the song which were roared rather than sung, —

"In Athol lived a man named Jerry Lanagan,
He battered away until he had n't a pound.
But his father he died and made him a man ag'in,
Left him a farm of ten acres of ground."

"They don't know but two songs," said Frank. "They sing this one; and if you wait a few minutes you'll hear the other."

The words of the second song were not so plainly understood, however, but they related the exploits of a certain Irish highwayman named Brennan, whose chief virtue apparently was that "what he robbed from the rich, he gave unto the poor."

Several stanzas were sung and then the chorus was "howled," as Dennis described the action, —

"Brennan on the moor!
Brennan on the moor!
Proud and undaunted stood
Brennan on the moor."

When morning at last dawned, the Regulators mustered on their grounds and then marched to the open space on the South Side, where the rations were issued. Every man was armed with a small club, which was tied by a string to his wrist.

"The Johnnies are scared worse than the Raiders are," whispered Dennis to Frank as they drew near the place. "See there! They have all their infantry in battle line."

"Do you suppose their guns are loaded?" asked Frank.

"No question about that, and the cannon are shotted. Why, they have got fuses fired, and men are standing with the lanyards in their hands, ready to mow down everybody. But they won't interfere with our fracas unless they think we're getting too near the stockade. What they are afraid of is that we'll try to rush the gates and that this fight

between the Raiders and the Regulators is only a pretense."

"Look there! Just look there!" interrupted John in a low, tense voice. Both his companions quickly turned and looked in the direction he had indicated. For a moment all three were silent, and then Frank said in a low whisper, "I never again expect to see such a sight in all my life. I hope I shall never see another one like it."

The slope of the hill behind them was so arranged that many of the vast assembly of 20,000 men, that had gathered near to watch the contest, were standing in such a position that the face of one man showed just above the shoulders of another in front of him. The effect was to make the sight like one of acres upon acres of human faces.

"Indeed," said Dennis in a whisper, "it looks as if the whole broad hillside was just paved or thatched with human heads."

At last everything was ready for the contest. Dennis, with five others, was leading the advance. Throughout the prison there was silence, tense and pronounced.

As the Regulators moved forward, the Raiders stood mustered in a strong heavy

line, with the center, against which the advance of the Regulators was moving, held by the best known and most powerful of their leaders.

It was impossible to determine just where the lines of the Raiders ended and the lines of the spectators began. Indeed, it was suspected that many of these who were supposedly spectators would join the side which won the victory.

Not a blow was struck until the Regulators came close to the line of their enemies. Then there followed a moment of anxious silence. Frank, together with John Oatman and others, because they were weak and scarcely able to bear the strain of the contest, were stationed on the flank of the main body.

Almost breathless the boys halted and watched the two lines as they steadily approached each other. There was a moment, which seemed unduly prolonged, when the men appeared to hesitate and wait, and then the center of the force of Raiders threw itself forward and grappled savagely with the leaders of the advancing Regulators.

CHAPTER XVIII

PREPARING FOR THE EXECUTION

NOT a blow was struck until the advance lines came together; then followed a struggle which was desperate. Strong men fiercely clenched and exerted themselves to the utmost of their powers to force back the opposing lines. There were shouts and cries mingled with the sounds of the blows that were falling on every side. The spectators, intensely interested in the contest, the issue of which would mean so much for the prisoners, in silence watched the contestants.

One minute passed, a second followed, and still the surging lines throbbed backward and forward. The men advanced a step or two and then by a mighty effort were flung back.

When three minutes had elapsed, slowly the line of the Raiders moved backward. The next instant the advance line of the Regulators broke through that of their opponents and their enemies were scattered.

When five minutes had passed the over-

throw of the lawless Raiders was complete. Indeed, they no longer were trying to resist, but were all seeking safety in flight.

At that moment the long pent-up excitement of the spectators found expression in a yell that almost seemed to make the very ground itself tremble. From the victorious Regulators came back an answering shout, which freely indicated their joy over the victory, and the relief from the tense strain which had long been apparent. A few prisoners were taken by the victors, and as soon as these had been taken to the enclosure which Major Wirz had promised should be reserved for them, the Regulators were ready to retire.

Every man was very tired and all alike were hungry. The time for the daily rations had now arrived. Wagons containing bread and mush had been driven to the gates. There was consternation among the prisoners when it was speedily learned that Major Wirz had refused to permit the gates to be opened. Evidently the commander was fearful that the men were so excited they might make an attempt to sweep through them and overpower the guards. In vain was word

sent the commander that all operations had ceased and that the rations might enter without any activity among the men. The appeal, however, was in vain. Wirz was thoroughly scared. The wagons were left standing in the heat of midday, until the mush fermented and became sour and had to be thrown away. Consequently every prisoner went rationless to bed that night and when he arose the following morning, it was with an empty stomach to goad him on to his endurance of another day.

It was estimated that the number of Raiders at any time did not exceed five hundred. Their activities, however, like those of a pestilence, had made their work and names familiar throughout the prison.

It was determined now by the leaders that the arrest of the leading men among the lawless men should be made. It was marvelous with what zeal most of these arrests were accomplished. The several constituted authorities, who were the leaders of the Regulators, were seldom strongly opposed in their efforts. Occasionally, however, a notorious character would resist, but in every case he was overpowered and secured, his compan-

ions now no longer daring to come to his rescue.

Indeed, the courage of the entire camp seemed to revive at once. Blankets, cooking-utensils, tent poles, were seized, either as property which had been stolen or as legitimate spoils. Even the ground was dug over in a search for valuables that had been hidden. Great quantities of watches, chains, gold pins, etc., were found and the zeal of the hunters increased daily. Even the quartermaster of the Confederates brought in a squad of soldiers and joined in the search for the buried treasures.

By the evening of the second day, the small stockade, which formed the entrance to the North Gate, was filled with one hundred and twenty-five of the most detested and well-known leaders of the Raiders.

Seriously and solemnly the Regulators proceeded to try the men who had been arrested. Thirteen sergeants organized a court-martial. The judges were selected from those who were among the men that most recently had arrived, so that there might be no prejudice against the prisoners.

With all the formality of the law the trial

then was conducted. Every prisoner was confronted by witnesses who testified against him and he was permitted to cross-examine them as much as he desired. The fear of the Raiders was still so strong in the minds of many of the prisoners that they dared not testify as to all they knew against them. Still, there was no lack of evidence. Among those who had been robbed or maltreated there were many who were willing to bear witness concerning the outrageous treatment they had received.

For several days the trial continued and at its close six of the worst of the Raiders were sentenced to be hanged. Others were to wear balls and chains, while a large number were to be compelled to run the gauntlet.

As soon as the sentences had been pronounced, the men, to whom the penalty of wearing a ball and chain had been given, were brought in and the irons were at once fitted to them. These instruments previously had been worn by some of the prisoners as a punishment ordered by Major Wirz for their attempts to escape from Andersonville.

While the judges and the leaders of the

Regulators were discussing how the punishment of the others should be carried out, a sudden and unexpected solution was found.

Once more, Major Wirz, fearful that a dispute might arise among the men, commanded the prisoners to return into the stockade, and he also refused to grant a further time for disposal of the cases. Wirz then ordered the officer of the guard to compel all, except those who had been sentenced to death, to return within the stockade.

Meanwhile, throughout the prison there had spread a rumor that the guilty prisoners were to go without any punishment. Because of this, an angry mob, numbering several thousand, and largely made up of those who had suffered much at the hands of the marauders, assembled near the gate. With clubs in their hands they stood waiting for the return of the Raiders. In two long parallel lines facing each other, they grimly awaited the approach of the men against whom they had vowed vengeance.

In response to the orders of Major Wirz, the officer of the guard opened the gates and instantly began to drive the prisoners through them. At times the point of the

bayonet was required to compel the reluctant men to step forward, aware as they were that they must run for their lives.

A scene followed, when the unfortunate men were caught between the lines, which those who witnessed it never were able to forget. Some were able to break through and in such cases they were usually permitted to go free. Others, however, struggling under the load of blows which were rained upon them, fell to the ground as the only way to escape the vengeance of the suffering men.

The rumor that six men had been sentenced to be hanged soon spread throughout the prison. There were many exciting discussions as to when the executions would take place, and whether or not they would occur inside the stockade. It was also reported that the friends of the doomed men might make a desperate attempt to rescue them. In such a condition, the engagement threatened to become even more general than that which had taken place a few days before.

The leaders of the Regulators, however, retained their own counsel. The first inti-

mation that came to the camp that the leaders had decided on the plan they were to follow was an order for some of the more reliable members of the Regulators to stand guard over the condemned men. It was understood also that all the Regulators were holding themselves in readiness to rush to the relief of their leaders if the latter should be attacked.

A rude structure was erected near the spot where the "big tent" of the Raiders had stood. This was within plain sight of the entire camp.

Soon after the carpenters began their task, the N'Yaarkers assembled near them in considerable numbers. For the most part they were sullen and somewhat abusive in their language. Occasionally from their vile vocabulary they selected certain special abusive epithets which they hurled at the workers, declaring that they never would be permitted to carry out the executions. They also loudly declared that they had marked for death every one that took any part in the building of the scaffold.

So violent became the abuse that several times there was danger of a riot breaking out

then and there. At last, however, the rude gallows was completed and no violence had as yet occurred. The scaffold was a very small and gruesome affair. It consisted merely of a stout beam which was fastened on the tops of two posts, about fifteen feet high.

The excitement in and around the prison now became intense. The Regulators quietly formed a hollow square around the scaffold. Of the 30,000 prisoners, — for recently the numbers had been greatly increased, — nearly one third placed themselves as nearly as possible outside and yet close to the square. The remainder, forming a solid human mass, took their stand on the north side.

Once more Frank was impressed, as he looked toward the vast assembly, by the stirring resemblance of the scene before him to a mosaic pavement of human faces, covering an entire hillside.

The excitement outside as well as within the camp steadily increased. The day was intensely warm. The direct rays of the sun, striking the motionless crowds, also made the heat almost unbearable.

At this moment the gate was opened and Major Wirz rode forward. He was dressed in a suit of white duck and was mounted on a white horse, a fact which caused Dennis to whisper to Frank, "I've heard of 'Death on a pale horse,' but I never saw him before."

Frank, however, was too intensely excited to give any heed to the words of his companion.

Behind Major Wirz came a faithful old priest, his face expressing his deep sorrow. As he advanced he was reading the service for the condemned. Behind the priest followed the six men that had been sentenced.

The entire band came inside the hollow square and then halted. Then it was that Major Wirz turned to the leaders and said,—

"Brizners! I return to you dese men so gude as I got dem. You haf tried dem yourselves and found dem guilty. I haf had nothings to do mit it. I vash my hands of everything connected wit dem. Do mit dem what you likes. May Gott have mercy on you and on dem. Garts, about face! Vorwarts! March!"

When he had thus spoken, the major turned and departed from the place.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ARMIES

It is time for us to return and again follow the fortunes of Noel Curtis, whom we left with the hunter, Sam Sikes, leading the young soldier in a fire hunt.

In order to understand what later befell Noel, however, it is necessary for us to delay long enough to enable us to ascertain what the position of the Union armies was at this time and what events had led up to its present condition.

After the disappointing work of the Army of the Potomac under the command of General McClellan, a radical change had taken place. The failure of General McClellan on the Peninsula, the disastrous battle at Bull Run, as well as the indecisive character of the battle at Antietam, had aroused so strong a feeling among the resolute men of the North that the command of the army was taken from McClellan and given to Ambrose E. Burnside. It is true that Gen-

eral Lee had been compelled to return into Virginia after his failure to push farther than Antietam in his efforts to move northward. But the battle of Antietam itself was indecisive. Each side lost about the same number of men, although the Union forces outnumbered those of their enemy.

McClellan was blamed for his slowness and lack of action, and General Burnside accordingly became his successor.

Burnside now marched his army to Fredericksburg. About 125,000 men were in his ranks and they were eager to redeem the former failures of the Army of the Potomac. Indeed, Burnside's plan was to cross the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg and then move directly upon Richmond.

General Lee, and his follower, General Jackson, reached their side of the Rappahannock before Burnside's men arrived. Their first task was to fortify the hills behind Fredericksburg.

In spite of these fortifications, Burnside at once crossed the river with his army and tried to storm the hills.

Another severe defeat and heavy loss at Fredericksburg fell upon the Army of the

Potomac. It was now driven back to the north side of the Rappahannock.

Again the command of the army changed. General Burnside was removed and the command was given to General Joseph E. Hooker. The battle at Fredericksburg had been fought, December 13, 1862. The year had been a changing one in its effect upon the army, but on the whole, in spite of the severe defeats inflicted by Lee, the Union cause had moved forward.

The Union forces had not lost any ground in Virginia. They had advanced across the entire State of Tennessee and the Mississippi River had been almost opened. The blockade along the Atlantic Coast was becoming steadily stricter, so that the people of the South were unable to obtain even such common medicines as quinine. The two great attempts made by the Confederate Generals, Bragg and Lee, to break through the lines of the Northern armies had been frustrated.

At this time the North was spending nearly \$3,000,000 per day on its army; 1,300,000 volunteers had been called for. The number of vessels in the navy numbered

six hundred, and the people had abandoned all thought that the war was to be an easy matter.

One of the most stirring events at this time was the Proclamation of President Lincoln, soon after the battle of Antietam, setting free the slaves, or at least declaring that the slaves in the seceding States would be set free at the beginning of the following year unless the States returned to the Union by that time. As no seceding States returned, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued on the 1st day of January, 1863.

For some months the Army of the Potomac, of which General Hooker now was in command, remained quiet on the north side of the Rappahannock. Then General Hooker again led the army across that river, but this time he kept north of the strong defenses which Lee had erected behind Fredericksburg.

Steadily General Hooker forced his way ten miles nearer Richmond. Then, at a little place named Chancellorsville, the Army of the Potomac was met by Lee's army. One of the great battles of the Civil War followed (May 2-3, 1863).

Both Lee and Jackson were skillful generals and succeeded not only in inflicting a heavy loss upon the Union army, but also again drove it back across the Rappahannock. The Confederate cause, however, suffered one of its most severe losses in the death of "Stonewall" Jackson in the battle of Chancellorsville. By some mistake he was shot by his own men, some time in the night that followed the first day's battle. We are not surprised to-day that General Lee declared "that he had lost his right arm in losing Jackson."

Aware that the purpose of the Northern army still was to take Richmond, General Lee prepared for a second invasion of the North. His army, which now numbered 70,000 men, was moved around to the west of Hooker's army until it reached the Shenandoah Valley. Meanwhile, to protect Washington, Hooker was drawing back his army of 100,000 men. In a little while the movements of the two armies became almost a race as to which should first gain the North. General Lee's army moved through the Shenandoah Valley, then across the Potomac River at Harper's Ferry, then,

after marching across Maryland, it entered Pennsylvania.

Lee's threatened invasion greatly alarmed the people of the North. All business was stopped in Philadelphia, and regiments of militia were called from all the States to help the Army of the Potomac, which now had crossed the Potomac between Lee and Washington and had moved northward, through Maryland, to protect Baltimore and Philadelphia.

Again there had been a change in the commanders. General Hooker's place was now filled by General George G. Meade. Just as Lee turned eastward from Chambersburg to move upon Philadelphia, the Army of the Potomac was thrown between him and the city, and the two armies met in battle at Gettysburg. This battle, which was fought July 1, 2, 3, 1863, was one of the greatest of the entire Civil War. The Union army was stationed on the crest of a line of hills called Cemetery Ridge. On the crest of the hills opposite, called Seminary Ridge, the Confederate army was stationed. In the valley between them was Gettysburg.

At the close of the first day of fighting the

battle appeared to be going in favor of the Confederates. On the following day they even succeeded in taking one of the Union positions. But on the third day came the final and most terrible struggle of all. For two hours the Confederates kept up a tremendous fire from one hundred and fifty cannon, and then made their famous charge, in a line that was more than a mile long.

It was a brave and gallant charge, but it was gallantly met. For three long hours the desperate struggle continued, and then, when the sun set, the battle of Gettysburg was ended and Lee had been defeated.

Promptly that night Lee moved southward with his army through Maryland and Virginia to the Rapidan, which is a branch of the Rappahannock. The Army of the Potomac slowly followed until it arrived at the opposite bank of the Rapidan, where it took a position in which it remained until the following year, when General Grant came to Virginia to assume the command.

It is also necessary for us to understand that at the beginning of the year 1863, the Union had four armies in the West. One of these armies was in northern Mississippi

near Holly Springs, where General Grant was in command. Another was in Louisiana, of which General Banks was the leader, he having succeeded Butler. Another army was near Murfreesboro, of which General Rosecrans was the leader, and still another army was in Arkansas. The hope of all these armies was to open up the Mississippi River and cut the Confederacy into two parts. As General Grant was close to the river, the chief work fell first upon him, although he was ably assisted by General Sherman.

The Mississippi was still blocked by very strong Confederate fortifications at Vicksburg and Port Hudson. Between General Grant and Vicksburg, General Pemberton was in command of a Confederate army, while all the Confederate forces of the West were now under the control of General J. E. Johnston. But the two Confederate generals were not on cordial terms. In the preceding year, Pemberton had sent cavalry to the rear of Grant's army and captured Holly Springs and the supplies that were located there. He had thus prevented General Grant from succeeding.

Pemberton was so elated by his success

that he believed he was a greater man than his commander. As a consequence, he did not follow closely the orders of General Johnston. The latter hoped to avoid a siege at Vicksburg, since he preferred to fight Grant in the open. Pemberton, however, promptly prepared to strengthen the fortifications of Vicksburg and made ready for a siege.

General Grant's first plan was to take his army across the Mississippi at Memphis, and then move down the west bank of the river until he was opposite Vicksburg. This plan he followed, and he then tried to cut a canal across a wide bend in the river so that Vicksburg would be left at a considerable distance from the shore.

The waters of the Mississippi, however, could not be turned and Grant's plan consequently failed. Two months passed before the determined general discovered that Vicksburg was too strong to be taken from that side of the river.

In April, Grant abandoned his former plan, moved his army and started farther south below Vicksburg, proceeding through a low and very swampy region.

At the same time that the army was moving, the fleet of gunboats ran past the batteries without suffering much injury, and these boats were then used to ferry Grant's army across the river.

Once more the Union soldiers were on the same side of the river as that on which Vicksburg was located, although they were below the city. Meanwhile, General Sherman, who was in command of a part of the army on the Yazoo River, kept up an attack on the north side of the city, striving to distract the attention of the Confederate commander. At the same time General J. E. Johnston was vigorously at work gathering an army at Jackson and planning to move to the help of Pemberton at Vicksburg.

Soon after he crossed the Mississippi, General Grant started northward, fighting five different and successful battles as he advanced. When he arrived at Jackson, he already had driven Pemberton within the fortifications at Vicksburg, and at the same time he had compelled General Johnston to withdraw on the other side. General Grant now turned back from Jackson and once more joined his army with that of Sher-

man's and with the entire force began a siege of Vicksburg.

The grip of the great general was like that of a bulldog. He could neither be turned aside nor could his hold be shaken. He threatened one of the armies in the rear, and at the same time he besieged the army of the city. When six weeks had passed, Vicksburg surrendered (July 4, 1863) and 37,000 prisoners were taken by the victors.

Soon afterward, on July 9, Port Hudson surrendered to General Banks, so that by the capture of the two places, Vicksburg and Port Hudson, the Union armies and fleets secured control of the entire length of the Mississippi River. It was impossible now for the Confederates to bring grain and cattle from Arkansas and Texas, and the problem of feeding their armies east of the Mississippi became desperate.

At this time, also, General Grant sent a force into Arkansas securing possession of most of that State.

The army which could hold Chattanooga would be able to control all eastern Tennessee as well as the northern part of Georgia. There was therefore a great desire on the

part of the commanders of both armies to secure this place.

In the summer, General Rosecrans moved a part of his army so far around that of his enemy that the Confederates evacuated Chattanooga and retired about twelve miles to the south into Georgia, where they took a position behind a little creek called the Chickamauga. Before Rosecrans could attack, his enemy received reinforcements and consequently the Union army was badly defeated at the battle of Chickamauga, September 19-20, 1863. A part of the Union forces, under General Thomas, held their ground for a time, enabling their comrades to gain the shelter of Chattanooga. The Confederate army, under General Bragg, quickly followed, and so closely shut up the Union army in Chattanooga that starvation threatened it.

For about two months the siege was kept up. The only road open to the Union troops by which they could leave was very difficult to travel and it was in poor condition. The other road was under the control of the Confederates, who were stationed on Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. Each of

these places was nearly a half-mile high and fortified so strongly that it was not believed either could be successfully attacked. Southern men believed at the time that the Union army in Chattanooga must surrender. Indeed, General Bragg was so confident, that he even sent away a part of his army to help at Knoxville, which place at the time was held by Burnside.

At this time all the Union armies east of the Mississippi River were placed under the command of General Grant. The resolute leader drew soldiers from all these armies and also from the Army of the Potomac. He also selected Sherman and several other able generals to assist him, and then made quiet preparations to storm the lofty mountains near Chattanooga, held by the Confederate soldiers.

By sudden and unexpected assaults November 23, 24, 25, Grant stormed both Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. At times the fighting was so high upon the mountain-side that the soldiers were hidden by the clouds. It is for this reason that the battle of Lookout Mountain is often called the "Battle above the Clouds."

Naturally the Confederate forces were compelled to withdraw and for the remainder of the year there were no active military operations in the West.

CHAPTER XX

THE LEADER

GENERAL GRANT by this time had won a place in the affection and confidence of the people of the North that made him the most trusted as well as the leading Union general. In the spring of 1864 (March 3) Grant was appointed lieutenant-general. This position made him the first commander, under the President, of all the Union forces. There was no man to whom the Union generals turned with such complete confidence now as they did to the new leader.

Meanwhile, the distress among the Confederate States had been steadily increasing. All the men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five had been gathered into the army, with the result that the women and children were compelled to do the men's work at home. The soldiers themselves were poorly fed and clothed, and at this time their arms were inadequate.

Food, too, was scarce and very high in price, for, as we know, the Southern people

now were unable to get cattle from beyond the Mississippi. There were no supplies of grain to be had from Virginia and Tennessee, no sugar to be brought from Louisiana, and no fish or salt to be obtained from the coast. Such crops of cotton as they were able to raise could not be sold, for the blockade was very strict. The railroads were fast wearing out, and there were no great iron-works in the Southland to replace them. Paper had become so scarce that sometimes printing was done on one side of wall-paper. The Government of the Confederate States had issued so much paper money that it was almost worthless. Indeed, twenty dollars in Confederate money was worth only one dollar in gold. Butter was selling at five dollars per pound, coffee was ten dollars per pound, corn and potatoes fourteen dollars per bushel each, and beef was one dollar and fifty cents per pound.

In the North and in the West there was no such suffering. The Northern army was well-fed, properly equipped and armed, and had sufficient clothing.

One of the chief sources of trouble in the North had arisen from the drafts. Volun-

teers were not so numerous now as they formerly had been, and in order to fill up the armies the names of able-bodied men from all over the country were drawn by lot from lists. The men whose names were thus drawn were compelled to enter the army, or to pay for substitutes.

The first draft in New York City was stopped by a great mob. For several days the lawless men held control of the city and burned houses and murdered negroes. It was not stopped until soldiers were hurriedly brought from Gettysburg. After that, drafting went on without opposition.

Another serious trouble confronting the North was due to France. That country, aided by Great Britain and Spain, had overthrown the Republican government of Mexico. Soon afterward troubles for the United States began. Although the United States considered this an unfriendly act, the country was too busy with its own affairs to resist it. France accordingly made Mexico into an empire and placed an Austrian archduke, Maximilian, on the throne as emperor. Later, Maximilian, after France had decided to withdraw her troops from Mexico, re-

fused to leave. In 1867, although the United States asked that the ex-emperor's life should be spared, he was captured and shot by the Mexicans.

At the beginning of the year 1864, the Confederates had only two great armies east of the Mississippi. Lee's army held the Rapidan River, near Fredericksburg, with 62,000 troops. Johnston, with 75,000 men, was holding Dalton, Georgia.

General Grant, after he assumed command of all the armies in the United States, left General Sherman in command of the army before Dalton, while he himself and Sheridan went to meet Lee in Virginia.

General Grant had won his victories in the West by constant "hammering." After he arrived in Virginia his first plan was to continue the same line of operations there also, but the general who was opposing him was very different from the men whom he had fought in the West. Indeed, General Lee already had won the reputation of being one of the most skillful generals the world had ever seen.

Some one said that while Grant was trying to "hammer" at Lee, it was like a battle

between a man with a club and a man with a sword. General Grant did not succeed until at last he gave up his club and began to use his own great military skill.

General Grant decided to try to follow the overland route from the Rappahannock River to Richmond. First he sent General Butler with an army of 30,000 men up the James River to attack Richmond from that side. Another army was sent up the Shenandoah Valley to threaten Richmond from the West. Then General Grant planned to advance with the main army and strive to get between Lee's army and Richmond.

This object he was not able to accomplish until after the bloody battles of the Wilderness (May 5-6-7, 1864). The fierce fighting there that followed had the effect, in the course of six weeks, of pushing General Lee and his army back within the fortifications of Petersburg and Richmond.

In the first three days of the battle of the Wilderness the Union forces lost 38,000 men. In the fighting that followed at Spottsylvania Court-House 26,000 more men were lost. The loss of General Lee at the same time was about 20,000 men.

But Grant, although he changed his plan, was as determined to succeed as when he began. During the long sieges of Petersburg and Richmond that followed, General Lee tried to divert the Northern army by first sending soldiers with General Early into Maryland and Pennsylvania; but General Sheridan was Grant's helper and he defeated and drove back the advancing Confederates.

As the Union army moved forward, the grim determination of General Grant became still stronger. One time an aide tried to deter him from taking up the Burnside Bridge over the Rapidan. General Grant quietly replied, "One bridge and the ford will be sufficient to cross all the survivors of this army, if we should have to fall back."

At another time, when General Grant stripped his commissary trains of their guards in order to fill a gap in his long line of battle and by that act exposed his army to the loss of all its supplies, he somewhat grimly said, "When this army is whipped, it will not want any provisions."

Still another time, in a letter which he sent to Washington, occurs one of his most celebrated expressions, "We have now ended

the eighth day of very hard fighting. The result up to this time is very much in our favor. Our losses have been heavy, as well as those of the enemy. I think the loss of the enemy must be greater. We have taken more than five thousand prisoners in battle, while he has taken from us but few except stragglers. I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."

To General Hancock the commander wrote, "Fight the enemy wherever he can be found."

He sent also the following message to General Sherman, "Lee is averse to getting out of Virginia, and if the cause of the South is lost he wants Richmond to be the last place evacuated. If he has such views it may be well to indulge him until we get everything else in our hands."

He sent word to the War Department that he wished all the crops in the Shenandoah Valley to be destroyed, "so that the crows flying over it for the balance of the season will have to carry their provender with them."

He also sent the following message to General Sheridan, "If this war is to last

another year, we want the Shenandoah Valley to remain a barren waste.”

The distance from Richmond to Petersburg is about twenty miles. General Lee had erected fortifications which ran in an irregular curve from below Petersburg to the north of Richmond, a distance of about thirty miles. To defend this line Lee had about 60,000 men. In front of him was Grant with about twice as many soldiers, attacking him at different places and keeping Lee so busy that he could not stop their operations.

As the campaign continued, General Grant steadily succeeded in pushing his own lines farther around to the southward. Whenever he succeeded in erecting new lines, Lee was compelled to face him with new fortifications. In this manner General Lee's line was all the time becoming weaker because it was becoming longer and more drawn out, and he was unable to secure any fresh troops.

General Grant, on the other hand, had as many men as he wanted.

After the battles in the Wilderness and those which immediately followed, General Grant made only one direct attempt to

storm the Confederate line. Carefully his soldiers dugged a mine under one of the Confederate forts and filled this mine with four tons of gunpowder. On July 30, the fort and the garrison were blown to pieces. Part of the plan had been for an assault by the Union troops to follow the explosion of the mine, but the plan was badly managed and the Union soldiers were driven back with heavy losses.

In the Shenandoah Valley, to which General Early had retired with his troops, Sheridan was defeated in the battle of Winchester. This was in September, and in the following month, Early surprised the Union army at Cedar Creek, about twenty miles from Winchester, and as Sheridan was absent at the time, Early succeeded in driving the men before him. In the afternoon, however, Sheridan came back to his defeated army, resolutely rallied his men, and, turning about, defeated Early in turn, driving him far up the Valley. The story of this famous battle is told in Read's poem, "Sheridan's Ride."

It was while these stirring events were taking place that Noel Curtis was moving

with his strange companion, Sam Sikes, through the swamps and forests on his way northward. Not yet had the fighting in the Wilderness been begun. Noel not only was expecting to hear of stirring deeds by the army from which he was separated, but now was eager to share in them all. But he was having experiences markedly different from those which the desperate soldiers were to meet in the Wilderness and at Spottsylvania Court-House.

CHAPTER XXI

NOEL'S GUIDES

SILENTLY Noel and the hunter had followed the dimly lighted trail that led through the woods. In certain places, Noel found himself walking through swamps with marshy ground on either side of his pathway. At other times he was led over ground that was high, and hills were to be seen in the distance.

Much of the journey was made in silence, but at times the loquacious Sam was unable to restrain his impulse to talk and entered into extended descriptions of his home life, as well as of his various exploits as a hunter.

One time, when they had stopped for a brief rest, Noel, recalling the description which Dr. Sterritt had given him of his companion's loss of his mule, turned to Sam and said, "The doctor was telling me that you were unfortunate not long ago."

"How's that, suh?"

"Why, he said that you were fire-hunting

and that you shot your mule, mistaking it for a deer."

"I reckon that's so," said Sam soberly. "It ain't the vally of the mule that I minds so much, though old Blaze was a mighty handy crittur on th' place. He shorely was worth one-fifty, too. But," continued Sam, shaking his head solemnly, "thar's my wife. Whenever she sees me comin' home she asks me if I've shot 'nother mule. Beats all how some women never seem toe let up on a feller. It was n't my fault. Poor old Blaze never had any right fo' toe do what he did."

"Why, what did he do?" inquired Noel laughingly.

"Why, he stood there blinkin' like he was a deer. His long ears looked like antlers, an' his eyes was shinin' like they was on fire."

"It was too bad."

"Howsomever, what can't be cured must be indured, as the feller said when the monkey bit him."

"That's the way to look at it," laughed Noel. "And Mrs. Sikes ought not to forget that accidents will happen. She ought to be thankful that it is no worse."

“Toe be sure she ought,” responded Sam cordially, “but that ain’t th’ way with her. She don’t believe in accidents nohow. Then, too, she is so owdacious onreasonable when she’s raised. But she better not,” — he continued, his voice becoming sterner as he spoke, — “she better not come a-cavort-in’ ’bout me with any of her rantankerous carryin’s on when I git home, fur I ain’t in no humor toe put up with sech things nohow.” As he spoke the hunter wagged his head vigorously, as if he would imply that henceforth he intended to be obeyed in his own household.

“I reckon,” continued Sam, “that I’d better be leavin’ yo’ now.”

There had been no evidence that his companion was on a hunting expedition, and Noel long had been puzzled as to just what Sam’s guidance meant. Whether the man was conducting him along an unfrequented and comparatively unknown pathway, and was acting under the quiet directions of Dr. Sterritt, or really was expecting to find some game, Noel could not determine.

“Yo’ got a compass, have n’t yo’?” inquired Sam.

"No, unfortunately I haven't any," replied Noel.

"Then yo'd better take this one," said Sam, holding forth a small compass in his hand as he spoke.

"I don't want to take your compass away from you."

"The doctor gave me this one and he told me I'd better let yo' hev it."

"I'm afraid it won't do me any good in the night," suggested Noel, as he took the little instrument.

"That won't make any difference."

"How is that?"

"Why, jes' cotch one o' these leetle fire-flies and put him under the glass and yo' can see what direction yo' all want toe go in mos' any time. Here, I'll help yo' do it."

Acting upon his own suggestion, the hunter soon secured one of the many fire-flies that were flashing their lights on every side.

In a brief time he lifted the glass which covered the delicate little compass and thrusting the fly upon the face of it he secured it in place by restoring the cover.

"Thar yo' be," said Sam, as he handed the

compass once more to Noel. "All yo' hev toe do is toe look at it and yo' can see th' direction any time. Th' doctor says as how yo' all was wantin' to go fu'ther no'th."

"Thank you," said Noel cordially. "This will show me the right direction, though I'm not sure that I know how to get there."

"I'm goin' to leave yo' at Zeke's," explained Sam.

"Who is he?"

"He's a friend o' mine. He's a hunter, too."

"What am I expected to do there?"

"Follow Zeke. He's goin' toe take yo' a pa't of the way after I leave yo' all."

"Did Dr. Sterritt tell you to take me to him?"

"In cou'se," said Sam glibly.

It was past midnight when at last the hunter halted before a cabin on the border of a great swamp.

The coming of the travelers was greeted by the yelping of a pack of hounds, but the cries ceased when Sam approached. It was plain that he was well known by all the dogs.

In a brief time Zeke was aroused from his

slumbers, and, after a whispered consultation with Sam, he speedily prepared himself to accompany the young sharpshooter.

Unlike his predecessor, Zeke was silent most of the time. At a somewhat rapid pace he led Noel along the pathway, avoiding the highways and frequently finding his way among the hills.

As Noel journeyed on, thoughts of the war became uppermost in his mind. He was well aware how bitter many of the men and women on either side were against their enemies. On the other hand, he had good reason for believing that there were men and women equally kind-hearted to be found behind either army. The kindness of Dr. Sterritt for example, he assured himself, would not soon be forgotten.

And yet, as Noel proceeded through the darkness, a feeling of loneliness swept over him in spite of his efforts to be cheerful. He suspected that his enemies were near and also that the Union army could not be far away. The journey which he had made with his brother and Dennis to Hamlet had covered one hundred miles or more. A part of the return had been made on the cars which

had been stolen from the train. Still, he assumed that he must be from fifty to sixty miles distant from the outposts of the Union army. Between him and the places occupied by his comrades thousands of Confederate soldiers were stationed. That he should be able to pass through their lines safely did not seem probable, and yet the young soldier was in no wise discouraged.

His meditations were interrupted by Zeke, who suddenly said dryly, "Did yo' all see that snake?"

"No," said Noel abruptly, stepping quickly to one side as he spoke. "I did n't see. How can you see it in the dark?"

"Well, it's gone, anyway," remarked Zeke abruptly.

The journey was at once resumed, and in silence the two men kept steadily on their way.

"This is 'bout as far as I'm toe take yo'," said Zeke at last. "From this time forward yo'll have toe go it alone."

"Can you give me any directions?" inquired Noel.

"Not very much. Yo' might keep toe the highway 'til mo'nin' comes —"

"But in which direction shall I go?" asked Noel.

"I thought yo' all wanted toe go toe the no'th."

"So I do."

"Well, that's the direction toe go in, then. Have yo' got a compass?"

"Yes," replied Noel, drawing the gift of Dr. Sterritt from his pocket as he spoke.

"Got a fly?"

"Got a what?" demanded Noel.

"Got a firefly?"

"Oh, yes," said Noel quickly. "Sam put one in my compass for me."

"Well, we've given yo' all a right sma't start on yore way," said Zeke. "I don't know who yo' be, and I don't want yo' toe tell me, though I have some suspicions o' my own; but when Dr. Sterritt sends word that I'm toe do somethin' fo' him I mos' generally tries toe do it."

"And I am very grateful to you," said Noel promptly.

"That's all right." As soon as he had spoken Zeke turned abruptly and retraced his way over the path by which they had come and speedily disappeared from sight.

Left alone, Noel did not delay, and, although he was by no means hopeful that he would be able to avoid his enemies, he speedily pushed forward on his way northward.

Several times he drew his illuminated compass from his pocket and was delighted to find that the glow of the firefly still continued and enabled him to see that he was not going astray.

When the light of the morning sun appeared, Noel arrived on the border of the great woods through which he had been passing and saw before him a highway. He was not only tired, but keenly hungry. Where he was to obtain food, however, was a question which at the time he was unable to answer. Turning to his right he followed the road, and when an hour had elapsed he arrived at a little settlement in the midst of which he was delighted to find a small store. There he was able to obtain a few supplies, and although he was aware that the money which he gave for his purchases at once aroused the suspicions of the storekeeper, his courage was strong when he departed from the place.

He had gone two miles or more and was looking about for a place in which he might find shelter, when suddenly he saw before him in the road a body of Confederate soldiers. It was too late for him to escape, for they already had discovered him. Striving to appear indifferent, the young soldier steadily advanced until he came to the place where he must pass the approaching soldiers.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TRADER

FOLLOWING the execution of the leaders of the Raiders, quiet for a time settled over the prison at Andersonville. There still were men who were evilly inclined, but now they had a wholesome respect for the self-constituted guardians of the peace, and they were aware that the prison authorities also upheld them in their demands.

The numbers in the prison still were steadily increasing. Originally the stockade had been erected with the thought that about ten thousand men could be confined within it. Nearly three times that number now were prisoners. The crowded quarters, the insufficient supplies, the lack of clothing, the steady rains, and above all the lack of food were rapidly increasing the deaths among the dejected men. There were still, however, a few, and Dennis was among the number, who were unable to lose their hope and who even found occasions for enjoyment amidst the depressing surroundings.

To take advantage of their guards, or of the occasional visitors that came to sell or exchange their wares, was considered fair play by all.

A few days after the events which have been recorded, an awkward, green, uncouth country boy came into the prison, explaining that he had vegetables for sale. By this time not much money remained among the prisoners. Whenever exchanges were made it was usually for some article of food. For any food that was eatable, buttons, watches, boots, caps, and other things that could be disposed of, were freely traded. Sometimes equally shrewd bargains were driven for wood which was necessary for the fires.

On this particular day, before "Johnny," as every visitor was termed by the prisoners, had arrived at the place where Dennis and Frank were standing, he had traded some of his green vegetables for a pair of army shoes.

These shoes he placed behind him on the ground, and while he was busy arranging his belongings Dennis slyly seized the shoes and passed them to a friend who ran quickly around to the front of the huckster.

“Hey, there! will you trade some of your green stuff for a pair of shoes?” inquired the newcomer.

“Yas, sir,” replied Johnny soberly. “I’ll give yo’ twelve pertaters for that thar pair o’ shoes.”

“It’s a bargain,” exclaimed the prisoner, seizing the potatoes and tossing the shoes to the huckster.

A loud laugh arose from the assembly, which caused the young countryman to glance behind him. Instantly he was aware of the trick which had been played upon him.

Taking up the shoes and tightly clasping them in his arms he indignantly shouted at the delighted assembly, “Durned if I kin trade with yo’ Yanks in that sort o’ way, nohow. Yo’re most considerable right smart at taking up traps what are n’t your own.”

At this moment one of the prisoners, approaching stealthily from the rear, crept up behind the loquacious huckster, and, without his knowledge, succeeded in cutting off four staff buttons which adorned the rear of a long, butternut-colored, short-waisted, “swallow-tailed” coat which the man was

wearing. Doubtless it had descended from generations that had worn it many years before.

As soon as he had secured the buttons the mischievous prisoner appeared in the crowd at the front, and saluting the visitor, he said, "Will you trade for these buttons?"

"I sho'ly will," said the huckster.

In a moment he had traded his last vegetables for his own buttons, and one record informs us that he "started off highly pleased and so were the boys."

As he made his way out of the prison the young countryman met a comrade who was entering at the time to continue the trading.

"Look yere, Josh," said the young man with the buttons, "jest see what I've got by a good trade. They're just like them thar what I've got on th' tail o' my coat."

His companion glanced behind his friend and said slowly, "Thar is n't a durned button thar."

Angry, and yet unable to reclaim his lost goods, the huckster, shaking his fist wildly at the stockade, shouted, "Them thar Yanks had orter have their ears buttoned back and be swallowed." The huckster,

however, did not remain to see that his dire suggestion was carried out. His fellow-trader, however, remarked, as he entered the gate, speaking to one of the prisoners and relating what had occurred, "I have hearn tell thet yo' Yanks down thar whar yo' all live make wooden pumpkin seeds, and I'll be dod rot if I don't think I got some of 'em and planted 'em yere before this war, for not a durned one come up 'cept what the pesky hens scratched up."

In the midst of these experiences, which were somewhat rare in the camp life, Dennis was doing his utmost to keep up the spirits of his companions, as well as to keep their bodies alive.

Frank's depression increased, when, not long after the Regulators had assumed a measure of control of the prisoners, he stood near the dead line one day and saw a poor, one-legged cripple place one hand on the dead line to support himself while he reached for his crutch, which had fallen from his feeble grasp to the ground. In this position he was shot by one of the guards, who was himself not much more than a boy and apparently was elated over his skill.

When Frank returned to their "shebang" and was relating his experience to Dennis, he was interrupted by the coming of John Oatman.

"I pretty nearly got away yesterday," explained John.

"How was that?" asked Dennis.

"Why, I went out with a party to pick up wood. There were twenty or more of us. I began picking up sticks and then gradually worked my way beyond the direct sight of the sentinels. The last look I had of them was when I glanced behind me and saw them trading peanuts for buttons."

"Were you trying to escape?" demanded Frank listlessly.

"Yes, I was. For fear some guard might see me, I kept on picking up sticks of wood, thinking that if they saw what I was doing, perhaps they might not fire on me. When I looked back I saw that several of the other fellows had taken the hint and that they were following me, picking up sticks, just as I was. Finally, we were all on the border, and without saying a word, and I guess there was n't any need of any one speaking, we dropped our sticks and ran like crazy men

through the woods for several miles. We kept on all night, except one hour when we tried to get some sleep, but it was raining so hard that the tree under which we stood dripped on us all night long. We were more wet than we would have been in a drenching rain. This morning we heard the bloodhounds, and then we climbed the trees."

"Of course they got you," said Dennis.

"Of course they did," acknowledged John; "though I think we were more frightened at the dogs than hurt by them. At least I did n't know of any one that was hurt."

"You're worse off than if you had n't tried it," said Frank, who was in one of his most despondent moods.

"Indeed I am not," said John. "I found out how the guards were picketed outside the prison, and I fixed it in my mind where each one was stationed. I talked with the guards all the way back after we were taken, and found out some more things about the way our men sometimes escape. It showed me, too, how they hunt the prisoners that manage to get outside. I'm a good deal encouraged and am ready to try it again."

"Sure you are," said Dennis quickly, "and we'll try it with you."

"I have got something here," said John as he drew a paper from his ragged pocket.

"What is it?" inquired Frank, who now began to be interested in the words of his friend.

"It's a map I have borrowed."

"How did it get into camp?" inquired Frank.

"Somebody smuggled it in. I have got some paper here that I have greased in bacon fat, so that it is transparent. I'm going to trace on this paper a part of this map."

"Sure you are," said Dennis; "and that is n't all we'll do either. I tell you, we're going to leave this place."

"We are that," said John confidently. "I tell you, too, you don't know what it's like outside the stockade. Why, it's the first time I've been out since I was taken prisoner, and I got my first breath of good air. I saw some grass that was green, too, and I can't tell you how sweet the smell of the ground and the woods was. I had almost forgotten that birds sing. It was like fairyland."

“Don’t say any more,” said Dennis. “It’s ’most too good to be true, but we’ll try it for ourselves pretty quick. Won’t we, Frank?” he demanded as he turned to his comrade.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ESCAPE AND THE CHASE

THE adventures of John Oatman, in spite of the fact that he had been captured and returned to the prison, greatly elated his immediate friends. John's description of what the country outside the stockade was like, as well as the fact that he was confident that it was possible for a few of the men to make their way out of the prison and somehow shake off the pursuing bloodhounds, was soon shared by his companions.

Frank's spirits revived and the possibility of escaping from Andersonville brought fresh courage to the young sharpshooter.

A plan of escape now became the one engrossing topic of conversation among the wretched prisoners. The one great obstacle to their success lay in the fact that numerous packs of trained dogs were kept near the prison, for the purpose of chasing the men who might escape. In addition it was known that Confederate guards had been stationed

at the cross-roads for at least fifteen miles from Andersonville.

Various theories as to means by which the dogs might be thrown off their scent were advanced by different men in the assemblies that were daily held.

"I'm telling you," declared one man confidently, "that red pepper rubbed on the soles of your shoes will make the dogs give up the trail."

"That's a fine suggestion," declared Dennis. "If you'll tell me where we'll get th' red pepper I'll be the first one to try it."

"No," declared another, "red pepper is n't any good. The only thing that will throw those dogs off our trail will be fresh blood."

"Don't you believe it," said Dennis confidently. "There's only one way to escape them. They can't follow a man when he's wading, or when he is in the water, or swimming on a log. They can't get in their work there, any more than they could if there were such things possible as flying machines."

Whatever the various opinions were, there was a determination to dig another

tunnel, and preparations were speedily begun. Throughout the nights and much of the daytime the men worked steadily on their new tunnel, determined this time to make it fully seventy feet in length and to extend it at least thirty feet beyond the stockade. The implements with which the desperate men labored in their excavation were mostly half canteens and broken tin quart measures.

The work steadily went forward without interruption, and at last it was declared by the workers that they had gained the desired distance outside the prison walls.

Then came the supreme test and not the least of the perils to be encountered. The tunnel was about six feet below the surface of the ground, and when the exit was made, — an act which the prisoners called “opening the tunnel,” — there was great danger that the one who first came into the open air would be discovered and shot. A second danger, hardly less than the former, was that of being smothered by the falling-in of the earth. Reports had been current of one tunnel which had unexpectedly opened in the midst of a picket fire. There was also a

rumor that the guards, when they saw the men suddenly emerge from the earth, declared with a shout that the strangers had come from a region much farther below, and in terror they had fled from the place. In spite of the laugh which this story aroused, there was no one who was eager to test it by repeating the events upon which it had been based.

Two hours of most careful and difficult labor finally enabled Dennis to "open up" the new tunnel. In view of this fact he was to have the privilege of being the first to thrust his head into the outer air. Behind him in a long line were his companions, every one eager to leave the loathsome place and yet all alike fearful of the experiences that might befall them when once more they should gain the upper air.

Dennis, who, as has been said, was the first to emerge, had no sooner gained a foothold on the ground than he saw not far away one of the outer picket-guard. A drizzling rain was falling and for the sake of comfort the guard had kindled a fire. So intent was he upon his own comfort that he failed to see the escaping prisoners, as one

by one they crawled stealthily from the tunnel and fled into the near-by thicket.

At one time a twig broke sharply under the feet of one of the men and the guard glanced quickly in the direction from which the sound had come. For a moment every one of the escaping soldiers believed that they had been discovered. In breathless suspense all stood motionless in the dim light and watched the guard. In a brief time, however, the picket again turned and stirred his fire, and then once more seated himself on the ground where he was able to enjoy the warmth of the crackling flames.

When at last every man had emerged from the tunnel, and all believed they were at a safe distance from the stockade, they assembled within the woods and a whispered consultation followed.

Suddenly the cry of the guard, "Twelve o'clock and all is well," was heard from the nearest sentry box, and then the cry was taken up and repeated from all the boxes, one after another, along the entire stockade.

Comforted by the declaration that "all was well," the consultation of the prisoners continued, until at last, separating into

parties of three or four, each of which was to go in a different direction from the others, and after they had silently grasped one another by the hand, all plunged into the gloomy pine forests to make one supreme effort to regain their freedom.

By common consent Dennis and Frank and their friend John Oatman formed one of the divisions. The only food possessed by the trio was a "pone" of johnnycake which they had saved in the prison by going without food the preceding day. They had in their possession also a small pocket compass, a little salt, and a knife which John had secured in his trades with the prisoners.

The night was dark and the rain was falling steadily. On through the wet swamps and the pathless forests the three escaping prisoners, frequently stumbling, often falling, fled for their lives.

Soon after midnight, not far to their right, they discovered a fire burning. Abruptly stopping, the three young soldiers held a hasty conference.

"What is it, a picket or a camp-fire?" asked John.

"No man knows. It's likely it's both,"

replied Dennis. "It looks to me as if the land a little way ahead of us is higher. Suppose we go up there and find out, if we can, what the condition is."

Following the young Irish soldier's advice, the three boys succeeded in gaining the higher ground, and then, seating themselves upon some fallen logs, they talked over in whispers whether or not it would be better for one of them to try to discover the meaning of the light.

Suddenly Frank leaped to his feet and gazed ruefully down at the log on which he had been sitting. The club with which he was armed was held aloft ready for use, as the young soldier said in a hoarse whisper, "There's something in that log. I don't know whether it's a bear or —"

At that moment there was another sound of something or somebody stirring within the log, and Frank instantly became silent.

Dennis, however, advancing to the hollow log, said in a hoarse whisper, which penetrated farther than the tones of his voice in ordinary conversation, "Hi, there! Who is it in that log? Are you a Fed or a Reb?"

"Yank," came the response from within

the log, and emerging from the inside appeared a human form. The stranger, having shaken himself like a water-spaniel when it leaps from a stream, inquired, "Well, boys, what next?"

"We're going to tie your hands, old fellow," said Frank quickly. "We'll tie you up until daylight and then we'll be able to see if you look honest."

"That surely is fine," laughed the man from the log. "It's a great thing that you don't know me."

"Who are you?" demanded Dennis.

"Why, I'm Hopkins."

Quickly the voice and face of the man were recognized as those of a fellow prisoner who frequently had been a visitor at the "shebang" owned by Dennis and Frank.

"And where have you been?" demanded Dennis. "And how did you escape?"

"I floated down the river," replied Hopkins. "I had to find some place in which I could spend the night, and I did n't see any hotels that appealed to me more than the log. I want to go with you fellows for a little way, but not very far. I'm for taking my chances alone. Besides, I have got a

watch and that is something that I'll venture no one of you has."

The newcomer was quickly welcomed as a member of the party, and when daylight came, stiff and far more weary than when they had tried to secure some rest, they resumed their journey through the woods. The pone of johnnycake had been eaten, and throughout the day the fugitives stopped only to pick a few berries which were growing in the woods.

It was not until the following day that they obtained any other food. About noon-time they discovered a few cattle browsing in the woods.

"There's a yearling heifer over there," suggested Frank, as he pointed to one of the cattle not far away. "Perhaps she'll give us something to eat."

The suggestion was instantly acted upon and the unsuspecting creature was speedily killed. Much of the meat was divided among the prisoners and the skin was cut into strips, which, with the addition of pieces of cloth taken from the boys' clothing, was fashioned into rude haversacks in which their meat might be carried. As no

one in the party had any matches or any other means of kindling a fire, the meat was eaten without having been cooked.

The following day Hopkins left his companions, again expressing his preference to travel alone.

Soon after the boys resumed their journey, they discovered a band of a half-dozen negroes working in the woods. Turning abruptly, the prisoners were about to flee when one of the negroes called after them, "Don't be afraid, white men."

"I'll go see them," said Frank quickly. Leaving his companions within the shelter of the woods, the young sharpshooter advanced to the place where the old negro was standing and said, "Uncle, do you know what kind of fellows we are?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh," replied the negro. "I reckon I does." As he spoke the whites of his eyes appeared, a part of his attempt to express his friendly feeling.

"We're hungry and we want something to eat," said Frank.

"Wall, suh," said the old negro, rubbing his woolly head as he spoke, "yo' all does look mighty kind o' lean. Jes' step into de

bushes while I peers 'round like toe see if we done got some hoe-cake."

Frank rejoined his companions and watched the negro, as he did his utmost to move rapidly, an attempt which was difficult because he was suffering from the "mis'ry."

All the prisoners were closely watching the negro to see that he did not betray them. In a brief time the aged colored man returned and said, "I 'clare toe goodness, dis yere is mo'n half what us colored people hab fo' to-day. It's right sma't hard times in dese yere diggin's, but de day o' Jubilee is sho' comin'. 'Pears to me like it's a long time on de way. Looks mighty like it won't come in my time."

The half-famished men, thanking the negro for his kindness, devoured the ponies and soon afterward resumed their journey.

Six days had passed since the escape of the three prisoners and they had halted in a marshy strip of land in the woods through which they were passing. They were ravenously picking and devouring raspberries, which were growing in abundance there. Suddenly, John, who was the keenest of the

three in his watchfulness, interrupted the proceedings by saying, "Sh-h-h! I believe the dogs are after us."

On several occasions before this morning, when the three boys had been alarmed by the baying of hounds in the distance, they had scattered in order to avoid part of their trouble, and perhaps enable some of them to escape. This time, however, that method was not followed. In a brief time there was no escape from the conclusion that the dogs certainly were not far away.

"Come on," called Dennis sharply. As he spoke he led the way to a little brook near by and leaped into the water. His example speedily was followed by the other two boys. Frequently stumbling, often falling or slipping, they frantically endeavored to follow the course of the brook.

The little stream was narrow, and such protection as it might afford was not promising. The baying of the hounds soon was more distinctly heard, and Dennis said hoarsely, "We must separate. Look yonder, Frank," he added quickly. "There's a live oak. It has branches overhanging the brook. Climb up there and I'll help you."

Displaying more strength than Frank had believed he possessed, he grasped the low-hanging branches and with the aid of Dennis swung himself up among the leaves. His companions speedily disappeared, but only a few minutes had elapsed when the young sharpshooter, who had made his way high up among the branches and was clinging to the trunk of the tree, saw below him a pack of bloodhounds. The huge dogs instantly arrested their pursuit and following one another began to circle the base of the tree.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RETURN

CLINGING desperately to his place of shelter and yet trembling so violently in his alarm that he was fearful of losing his hold, Frank watched the scene below him.

Suddenly the dogs and men abruptly departed. Unable to see them, Frank, in terror, listened for the sound which he was fearful of hearing.

In a brief time his fears were realized. The yelpings of the dogs and the shouts of the men proclaimed the fact that they had found one or both of his companions.

Doing his utmost to obtain a view of what was taking place, Frank nearly lost his grasp upon the protecting branches. Recovering himself with difficulty, he found that he was still unable to see who had been captured by the dogs.

When the pack had first appeared, he had been impressed by the manner in which the pursuit was conducted. The horses of the

men were given loose rein and yet they closely followed the hounds, frequently neighing in a manner which seemed to indicate that they enjoyed the sport of picking their way through difficult places in the woods and of following the fleeing men.

Left to himself, Frank retained his seat in the tree and thought carefully over his predicament.

Very little sleep or rest had he been able to secure through the six nights and days since he had fled from Andersonville. Throughout much of this time he had been drenched with rain, and his right hip now was badly swelled and painful. His clothing, if the ragged garments he wore could be called by such a term, was in no condition for further use. Not long before he left Andersonville he had fashioned a pair of trousers from the bags in which the corn meal had been brought to the prison. A cap made of the same material fitted his head, though by no stretch of the imagination could it be said to adorn it. Cloth of the same material he had wrapped about his feet in place of shoes. The skin of the heifer had provided stronger material for the soles of his feet,

but after that had been used a few hours, Frank had thrown it from him in disgust.

At the present time he was weary, hungry, and drenched. When an hour had elapsed, he descended from the tree, his leg feeling almost numb because he had been sitting so long on the branch. Still determined, the young sharpshooter shook himself and then hopped about on one foot to increase his circulation. In a way he even congratulated himself that he had been more successful than his companions in evading the bloodhounds and their masters.

Seating himself on a log, Frank once more took the map from his pocket and carefully studied the directions in which he must go. According to his observations he had not varied very much in the route which had been selected.

It was now the middle of the afternoon. Frank was feeling much relieved, as he believed that the capture of his companions might convince the pursuers that they had secured all the men who had fled from Andersonville.

He had not advanced more than three miles, however, before once more he heard

the sound of the dogs on his track, Indeed, their mournful yelpings sounded not unlike the weird cries of wolves.

Hurriedly looking about him for a place of refuge, Frank was dismayed when he found that all the trees were pine and that he was unable to find a branch less than twenty feet above the ground.

The dogs meanwhile plainly were coming nearer. At that moment he discovered a rail fence a few yards distant, and instantly running to it he wrenched one of the rails from its place. The dogs by this time were almost upon him.

Drawing his left coat sleeve down over his hand, Frank thrust it forward as the leader of the dogs leaped upon him. As the ferocious brute seized in his teeth the extended sleeve, at that moment Frank struck with his stick. Exerting himself to the utmost of his strength, he brought the rail down upon the ugly head of the hound. The dog gave one prolonged yell, and instantly letting go his hold upon the sleeve began to rub his head among the leaves on the ground. By this time the entire pack, yelling and snapping, had surrounded the

young soldier. One of the dogs was quickly stretched silent upon the ground by a blow, but at that moment the man to whom the pack belonged came within sight.

In his loudest tones he shouted, "Let go that thar rail, yo' Yank, and git offen th' fence!"

Aware that it was useless to attempt to defend himself further, Frank laughed at the angry man, and at the same time swinging the rail, to which he still was clinging, he made it form a swift and complete circle, whereby he kept the dogs at a distance.

"I shall be happy to oblige you," he called to the man, who had now dismounted and was standing only a few yards distant, "but I have n't very much flesh to spare and I don't want to give any of it to these hounds of yours."

The young sharpshooter was not unmindful that the man now had drawn a rusty revolver which he cocked and raised as if he were about to shoot. The appearance of the weapon, however, was such that Frank was convinced that it was not loaded.

"I've got yer," shouted the man. "Don't try none o' yore Yank tricks."

"I have n't any tricks to try," said Frank quickly. "Call off your dogs and you may have me."

"Wall, I reckon yo' all are kind o' tuckered out and I don't mind givin' yo' a little spell o' breathin'," said the man not unkindly, after he had compelled the pack to get behind him. "I never did see," he exclaimed, "how yo' all do tear around. I've most worn out my trousers totin' 'round after yo' all. There was one time when yo' 'most threw us offen the track."

"When was that?" inquired Frank.

"When yo' crossed that thar brook. My dawgs could n't seem toe git th' scent no-how."

"How did you get the track at last?"

"Why, we took two packs and kept 'em at it fo' three hours, 'til finally they picked up th' scent. We never did understand how yo' made sech a beeline when yo' started into the woods."

Frank did not feel called upon to explain to his captor that a small compass had been in their possession.

"Now, git in the path," said the man, as he prepared to remount.

"I'm not rested yet," said Frank.

"Wall, I'll be dod rot! Yo' suhtainly do take this about as cool as any Yank I evah seen. Anybody might think that yo' had caught me, 'stead o' me bein' the one that's caught yo' all."

In spite of his disappointment, Frank was by no means utterly cast down. The very fact that he had been outside the stockade, and that at least the air he had breathed had been fresh and pure, although his exertions had been severe, had all benefited him.

"I want yo' all to git afore me," declared the captor, when at last Frank arose.

The prisoner did not protest, but as the return was begun he decided to walk as closely as possible to his captor, hoping that at some unexpected moment he might find him unguarded. In such an event, Frank decided that he would rid himself of the good-natured man by quickly lifting his captor's leg and throwing him on the opposite side of the horse he was riding. Perhaps the not ill-natured man suspected the purpose of his prisoner, for he frequently remarked, "Now, look yere, Yank, I smell a

mighty big rat. I want yo' all toe understand that I keep my eyes open tight."

As the journey continued, in spite of his disappointment, Frank was becoming more desperate and determined all the time. In the midst of one of these moods he suddenly turned upon his captor, believing that the time was opportune for seizing his foot, but the wily man abruptly said, "No, yo' don't! Yo' need n't try yore Yankee tricks on me."

By threatening to use his revolver (and Frank was still uncertain as to whether or not the weapon could be used), he compelled the boy to remain at least ten feet distant from him.

"Yonder is some friends o' yores," laughed the man, when near dusk they arrived at a cross-road.

Glancing quickly in the direction indicated by the man, Frank saw several packs of bloodhounds and several men mounted on tired horses. Apparently, the entire party had halted, either for rest or by some pre-arranged plan to await their companions.

Before him Frank also saw his friend John. Several members of the band were there, too, and in a little while after the two

boys had greeted each other Frank learned that six of those who had attempted to escape with him and Dennis had already been taken.

The man who had captured Frank now appeared to be the leader. His good nature was apparent, and when the party resumed their march, he was explaining to Frank various parts of his occupation.

"Yas, suh," the man was saying, "I've been huntin' niggers eighteen years. That don't pay as well as huntin' Yanks."

"How much do you get for every prisoner you take?" inquired Frank.

"Thirty dollars, but I've got toe divide it up now with th' others. Terrible hard days in these diggin's."

"Do you ever shoot a prisoner?"

"We sho'ly do. Yank, yo' all don't know how near yo' came to bein' left out thar in the woods a lifeless corpse. Beats all how near yo' come to gettin' away from me."

Frank, who now was walking opposite his mounted captor, turned quickly and said, "How was that?"

"Why, I jes' got toe a settlement toe forage fo' a bit o' somethin' toe eat, and on my

way back I ran upon yore trail. It was jes' my good luck."

"Not mine," said Frank soberly.

"That 's right, Yank; it was my good luck and yore misfortune, I reckon. But yo' never could have got away. My dawgs are the best-trained in Georgia. And they won't follow anything but humans. I'm tellin' yo', Yank, I wish yo' was a nigger."

"Thank you," replied Frank, laughing slightly as he spoke.

"Yas, suh, if yo' was a nigger, I wouldn't take three thousand dollars fo' yer."

"How far do we have to march before we are at Andersonville again?"

"About sixty miles, I reckon."

At last the wearisome march was ended and the recaptured prisoners were standing at the entrance gate of the loathsome place.

"Ach, you vas der Yankee vat got away vunce before." Turning quickly about, Frank saw that he was standing in the presence of Wirz, the commander of Andersonville. Turning to Frank's captor, the major said, "Vell, did you make der togs pite 'im goot?"

"No," replied the hunter.

“Vell, you must do so — next dimes. Vat you dink I do mit you?” demanded Wirz, as he again turned severely upon Frank.

“What I would like to have you do,” replied the young sharpshooter boldly, “would be to put a ball and chain on me and anchor me out here where I can get some fresh air.”

“Sergeant, dake dis man quick to der stockade,” ordered Major Wirz as he turned to the hunter.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WAY TO OLE WASHAM'S

MEANWHILE Dennis O'Hara fortunately had escaped the attentions of the band which had seized his comrades. He still was convinced that the way of safety was to be found by following the course of the stream. As he was without a map, copies of which John Oatman and Frank had carried, if it had not been for the supreme confidence of the young Irish soldier in himself, doubtless his misfortunes would have multiplied. As it was, his very inability to give any consideration to matters outside his own hopefulness helped Dennis materially as he fled on his way northward.

To his surprise, before night fell he once more found himself in the field where the negro who had recently befriended him was again seen.

"Sure," said Dennis to himself, "I have n't got very far away from the place from which I started! Th' first thing I know I'll

be goin' in a circle and I'll be back again at Andersonville."

Well-nigh exhausted by the violence of his recent efforts, Dennis nevertheless called the old negro and briefly told him of the peril which he now was facing.

"Dat's so, suh," said the old negro. "Dat ar' am too bad. It sho'ly is too bad dat yore friends hab been tuk again. Yas, suh. Yas, suh," he added. "I reck'n I kin help a bit. Yo' all stay right yere in de woods an' I'll repo't toe yo' all what we all kin do."

Fearful that his presence would be discovered by those who were not as friendly as the negro, and footsore from his flight across the fields and along the bed of the stream, Dennis was glad now for an opportunity to rest.

The system of the Confederates by which the prisoners that managed to escape to the outside of the stockade at Andersonville were caught had deeply impressed the young Irish soldier. Here he was fifty miles or more from the loathsome place and yet his perils were by no means less than when first he had set forth on his journey. At

every cross-road was a guard. Not unnaturally the people who dwelt in the region were friendly to the Confederate cause. Only the negroes had given aid, and of those who could be depended upon, Dennis was positive there were not many to be found.

Casting himself upon the ground, his danger now was less in his thoughts than was his desire for rest. In a brief time the young soldier was sleeping soundly.

Night had fallen when he was awakened by the gentle touch of the aged negro.

"What is it? What is it?" demanded Dennis, startled as he found himself in the strange place.

"Yas, suh," said the old negro. "Dat's all right, suh. Yo' all is toe go on toe ol' Washam's."

"Go where?" asked Dennis quickly.

"Yo' all is toe go on toe ole Washam's," repeated the negro.

"Who is he?"

"Yas, suh. He's a Union man."

"Is he white or black?"

"I reck'n he's black on de outside and white on de inside."

"Why am I to go there?" inquired Dennis.

"I reckon he kin gibe yo' a ho'se."

"A what?" demanded Dennis.

"A ho'se, suh."

"Has it four legs?"

"I reckon it hab, suh."

"Why did n't the Confederate army take it, then?"

"I reckon the ho'se sho' hab a spavin," acknowledged the negro with a chuckle. "Yas, suh, I reckon as how he done hab two spavins, one in each o' his behin' laigs. But dey des so't o' balances each other like, so dat when de ho'se limp one way he limp jes' as much de other way, and dat so't o' evens it up, suh."

"Where is this wonderful beast?" laughed Dennis. In spite of his weariness he was interested in what the white-wooled old negro was saying.

"I done tol' yo', yo' all is toe go on toe ole Washam's."

"And how far away does this wonderful man live?"

"It's a right sma't walk. I reckon yo' all kin git thar in 'bout a half 'n hour."

"Can we start at once?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh." Fumbling a moment in his pocket the kind-hearted negro produced another piece of corn bread which Dennis seized and speedily devoured.

"It's mighty kind of you, uncle, to help me out this way," he said when every morsel of the food had been consumed.

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh. I reck'n when de day o' Jubilee done come, dat yo' all will do as much fo' Pete's chil'en."

"And who is Pete?"

"He's mah boy, suh."

"How old is he?"

"I dunno, suh. I reck'n he's 'mos' a hund'ed."

"How old are you, uncle?"

"I don't disremember."

"Did n't your mother tell you?"

"No, suh. No, suh. I done fo'get all 'bout mah mudder. She was brung yere from 'cross de ocean."

For a moment even Dennis was silent. Before him he saw one of the tragedies of slavery. The aged man was the child of a woman who had been torn from her home and as a prisoner had been brought across

the sea to be a slave in an unknown land. How much that voyage must have cost her! What she had suffered and how strong her longings must have been to see again her friends and home in the jungle, Dennis dimly perceived.

However, the immediate prospect demanded quick action, and directing the colored man to show him the way it was not long before he was following the bridle path. Dennis shook hands with his helper, and after he had bidden him good-bye and promised to look after his grandchildren, if they ever came North, he turned once more into the narrow little pathway that led through the woods.

Footsore and weary, the thoughts of the young Irish soldier soon were diverted from his own aches and pains to the perils that beset him. He had been walking many miles over the rough little pathway when before him he heard the sounds of some one approaching.

Although there was no moon in the sky, the light of the stars enabled him to distinguish many of the objects near him. In a few minutes he was aware that some one

was coming on horseback. Withdrawing a few feet, Dennis waited for the man to approach, and soon was aware that the newcomer was a colored man astride a mule.

It was plain from the manner of the negro that he was not enjoying his lonely ride through the forest, and when he drew near the place where Dennis was hiding, the young Irishman abruptly hailed him.

"Fo' de Lawd!" chattered the frightened young negro. "I did n't do dat! No, suh! Yo' got de wrong pussun." As if to intensify the protest the mule suddenly braced itself and, elongating its head and tail until they were on a line, emitted several prolonged and heart-breaking brays.

"I shan't hurt you," said Dennis, as he stepped forth from his place of concealment. "I want you to tell me if I'm sure on the right road to old Washam's."

"What fo' yo' wan' toe see ole Washam?" demanded the negro, his fears apparently relieved in part by the appearance of the man, whose voice he had heard and consequently he was convinced that now he was dealing with flesh and blood.

"He's got a horse, has n't he?"

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh. I reck'n he hab. It is n't very much ob a ho'se," said the negro, his fears now apparently all gone.

"How much of a horse is it?" asked Dennis seriously.

"I can't des say, suh. Mas'er Bob wouldn't tak' de ho'se nohow, when he lef' home."

"Why not?"

"Why, suh, dat ho'se o' ole Washam's mus' be mos' er hunderd years ol'. It's done been dar evah sence I lived in dese yere pa'ts."

"Tell me how I shall know when I come to the place where old Washam lives."

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh. Yo' all des can't mistook it. It's right ahead — I is ole Washam's boy."

"You are?" demanded Dennis.

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh."

"What's your name?"

"My name, suh? Yas, suh; my name's Absalom, but dey mos'ly calls me Ab fo' sho't."

"Well, Ab, I wish you would take me to your father's house."

"Yas, suh. Yo' all has n't done tole me who yo' is yet."

‘Well, I’m a Union soldier,” said Dennis abruptly. “I’ve escaped from Andersonville and am trying to work my way North. An old negro back here told me to go to old Washam’s and said he’d let me take his horse.”

“Yas, suh. He sho’ly will,” replied Absalom, his fears having dissolved and full confidence returned. “I’ll done go back an’ des show yo’ all de way.”

“That’s good of you,” said Dennis promptly, quick to take advantage of the negro’s kind-heartedness.

“I’ll let you lead the way,” he added.

“Yas, suh. Yo’ all des mount yo’self on ol’ Bije,” he added, as he slid from his seat on the back of the mule.

Dennis eagerly accepted the invitation, although soon after he had seated himself astride the mule’s back, he almost envied his guide, who was walking by his side. The mule’s bones were not only much in evidence, but they were also exceedingly sharp. Whenever the poor beast stumbled, Dennis also almost fell.

The progress was exceedingly slow and a half-hour had elapsed before he arrived at a

little clearing to which his negro guide conducted him. No lights were to be seen about the place, but a peculiar call from the negro quickly brought a response from within the building. There was a whispered consultation, which resulted in Ab returning to Dennis, who had promptly dismounted and now was lying on the ground.

"Ole Washam done say dat yo' all bettah come inter de house. He say in de mo'nin' he'll sho'ly sta't yo' on yo' way."

"But I don't want to wait until morning," explained Dennis.

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh," said Ab. "He done understand dat yo' wan' ter go befo' de light shine."

In spite of his eagerness to be gone, the invitation was too attractive for Dennis to resist. He was well aware that his condition was not presentable and yet the kind-hearted manner in which the invitation had been given persuaded him that he and his "inhabitants" would be welcome in the little house. He, therefore, at once entered the little cabin and soon was convinced that the inmates were indeed eager to do all in their power for his comfort.

Food was prepared, which the young soldier ate almost ravenously, and then he was shown a cot on which he was told he might sleep. It was the first time in many months that Dennis had slept in a bed of any kind. His first sensations were so unusual that even his weariness failed to bring the sleep he desired. In a brief time, however, the young soldier was unmindful of his surroundings. Even Andersonville and its horrors had faded from his mind.

It was not yet light when he was rudely awakened by Ab, who explained, when at last he was aware that the young soldier's eyes were indeed open, "Yo' all sho'ly done sleep some! It's time toe be gone, suh, and I'm er goin' toe take Bijie and show yo' all de way."

CHAPTER XXVI

DENNIS AS A FIREMAN

STEADILY the young Irishman pursued his way, attended by his faithful companion. The latter had secured a small supply of food and insisted upon Dennis taking the most of it. Aware of the perils before him, Dennis did not hesitate to accept the offering, convinced that the black man could secure more food when he returned, while he himself was uncertain as to all further supplies.

At last, when about twenty-five miles had been covered and the mule had refused to advance another step, in spite of the entreaties of Ab, Dennis slid from the back of the animal which he was riding and said to his companion, "There's a railroad ahead. I can see a freight train on the tracks now. Do you know where that road goes?"

"Yas, suh. Dat ar' road goes toe de No'th. Mos' gen'rally de folks goes on dat road when dey sta'ts fo' Richmond."

"Is that so?" inquired Dennis eagerly.

"Then I'm going to say good-bye to you here and see if I can try some other plan. What there is left of me I think is pretty nearly in two parts. I might send one half on by freight and the other half I might hide here in the woods."

"Yas, suh. Yas, suh," said Ab, staring blankly at his companion, as if he did not fully comprehend what Dennis was saying.

"Good-bye to you," said the young soldier, "and thank you again for all you have done for me." He shook hands cordially with the black man and then at once departed.

Dennis soon was walking along the country road, eager to arrive at the little station before the freight train should depart. The train was headed in the direction in which Dennis most of all desired to go, and he was eager to secure some place on it where he might hide and be carried toward his own lines.

Cautiously approaching the station, Dennis discovered that the train was not heavily guarded, although apparently it was loaded with supplies for the soldiers.

Aware that a fresh complication had

arisen from the fact that the cars might carry him within the lines of the Confederate soldiers, he was constantly watchful, planning to secure his ride and then leave the train before he had gone farther than he ought. Ignorant of the main features of the country, Dennis was aware that his chances of escape were not promising; but his spirit of determination was unbroken and he was eager to make the attempt.

Slowly and cautiously approaching the cars in the middle of the train, after he saw that guards were stationed near the rear, he climbed upon the little platform and grasping the iron rod of the brake, clung doggedly to it. He was hopeful that his position would not be discovered and that he might succeed in covering some of the miles over which he must go before he should be brought nearer the army.

Not long after the train resumed its way, Dennis keenly regretted his action. It is true he was not discovered, but the roadbed was so uneven and the jolting of the cars was so severe that it was only with difficulty that he retained his grasp of the iron rod. His hands soon were torn, and he was feeling

severely the effect of the strain, when after a ride of ten miles the train once more halted.

It was impossible to continue in the way in which he had been riding. And yet Dennis was unwilling to abandon the cars. Whichever way of escape he might select he was certain to suffer. As he leaped or partly fell from his position to the ground, he saw that the engineer and the fireman were both standing on the ground near the locomotive. A sudden impulse led the young soldier to approach the men and say, "I'm desperately anxious to get to Martin's Ferry. I've no money, and I have walked a long way and I'm due there to-morrow."

Both men were staring at him, but as neither spoke, Dennis continued, "I have been working in the repair shops. I went back home, but I left all my wages there. The folks are desperately poor. I thought I could walk back to the shops, but it takes me longer than I reckoned. If yo' all will give me a lift I'll feed the fires to pay for my passage."

It was manifest that both men were interested, and the engineer said, "You'll wish yo' had walked, before yo' 've gone very far."

"I reckon that's so," said Dennis, doing his utmost to talk as he had heard the Southern men, "but look at my hands. My feet are worse than they are."

"Yore hands don't look like yo' could do much work," suggested the fireman.

"That's all right," said Dennis promptly. "Yo' give me the chance and I'll show yo'."

"Well, here we go," said the engineer. "Yo' can try it if you want toe."

Delighted to receive the permission, Dennis climbed quickly on board the locomotive and at once began his labors. Nor was there any rest for the young Irishman. Work as he might, it seemed to him that the fires needed continual feeding. He raked them down again and again, but apparently his labors were as useless as throwing snow into water to preserve it. The train load was heavy and the condition of the tracks, as well as of the locomotive itself, made the journey extremely difficult.

Dennis, however, did not complain. In his present position he was likely to escape the attention of the men whom he wished most of all to avoid. The fireman, happy in the thought that his difficult work was being

done by another, occasionally added a word of encouragement, but did not offer to assist his new helper.

The face of Dennis was soon streaming with perspiration, and, as his work continued, he became more fully aware of his own weakened condition. It seemed to him that it would be impossible much longer for him to continue what he was doing. The muscles in his back and arms were sore and the monotony of his labor gave him no opportunity for change.

At last, when the train once more slowed down, evidently preparing to stop at a little station which Dennis could see as he looked before him, he decided that he would no longer work his passage as he was now doing.

Glancing quickly at the little building before him, he was aware that it was the only one to be seen. Not a house of any kind was near by. Piles of railroad ties near the tracks, in addition to sheds which covered the wood for feeding the fires under the boiler, provided the only objects for which a train would stop at the desolate little station.

"I think I've had enough," said Dennis to his companions, as with difficulty he

stood erect in his cramped quarters. In his own mind he had decided that he would once more try the plan he had followed when first he had found a hiding-place between two cars. His hands were in a far worse condition now than before, but at least he would be able to rest the other muscles of his tired body.

No protest was made by the men, when Dennis, after he had glanced in either direction to assure himself that he was unobserved, awkwardly leaped from the locomotive. Hastily he made his way toward the rear of the train. He was on the side opposite the station and was hopeful that the agent would not discover his presence.

Congratulating himself that he had succeeded in his attempt, Dennis once more climbed to his place of refuge and seating himself on the beam threw both his arms around the brake. What a relief it was, he thought, to be no longer compelled to feed the ever-hungry fires beneath the boiler.

The air was warm, and, though his face still was wet with perspiration, the change was so marked that Dennis felt almost as if he was enjoying the coolest of breezes.

For some reason which he did not understand, the train remained a long time at the forlorn little station. It is true there was a siding there, and it was possible that another train was to pass. When what the young soldier estimated was an hour had elapsed, and the train still was motionless, he became somewhat alarmed.

If he should be discovered he would be compelled to explain not only his presence, but also who he was and why he was there. All of these things were difficult because his manner of speech would certainly betray him. Still the long continued halt was unbroken. Dennis was on the point of leaving his refuge and attempting once more to make his way on foot when he was startled by a hail.

“What yo’ all doin’ in there?”

Glancing hastily at the speaker, Dennis saw that he was confronting a man clad in a ragged Confederate uniform. He was aware also that the soldier was armed and that he was more than suspicious of the man he had addressed.

“Where do yo’ all belong?” demanded the man.

"I work up here in the repair shops at Martin's Ferry," stammered Dennis, at last regaining a measure of self-control.

"Yo' do, do yo'? Well, maybe yo' kin tell me, then, about Tom Adams. He works thar, too."

"Yes, I know Tom Adams," said Dennis glibly.

"Did yo' ever in yore life see such red hair as his?"

"No, I never did," said Dennis, striving to laugh as he spoke.

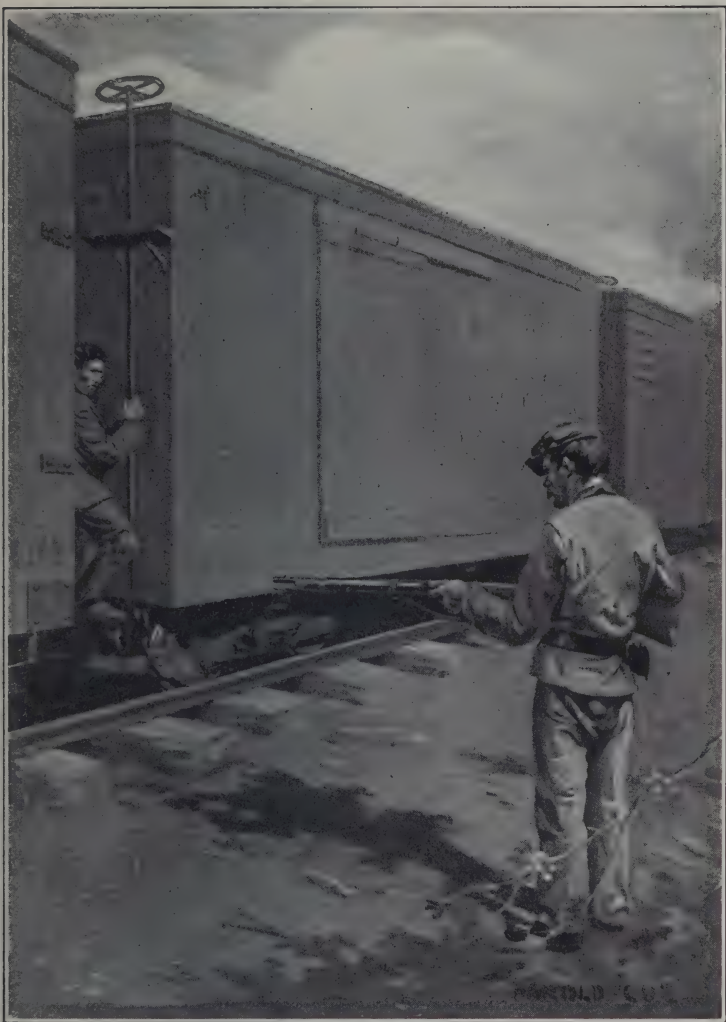
"And he must weigh about two hundred and fifty."

"I reckon it's more than that by this time," said Dennis. "He just simply seems to grow fat on hard work and we have been busy lately."

"Did Tom Adams work near yo' all?"

"Yes, his bench was right next to mine."

"That's all right," said the soldier. "Yo' all come with me. Tom Adams does n't weigh anywhere nigh two hundred and fifty pounds; he is n't red-headed, and I know every man that works in the shops. We'll give yo' all a chance to tell some one else yore fine story."



"WHAT YO' ALL DOIN' IN THERE?"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RETURN OF DENNIS

WHEN Frank Curtis once more found himself in the loathsome and despised prison at Andersonville, a strange and unexpected change came over his entire attitude. Instead of being cast down and despondent, as he had been previously, there was a spirit of determination now that was manifest even in the expression of his eyes.

It is true he was greatly emaciated. He was footsore from his long march and weakened by the exertions he had made in his efforts to escape. But in spite of all these things the experiences he had undergone in the past week had done more to arouse the young prisoner than had all the appeals of his closest friends.

For a week or more he had been permitted to breathe air that was free from pollution. His food had been scanty, but that was no new thing. What little he had received from the kind-hearted negro at least had been free from "inhabitants."

Perhaps more than any of these things, however, the very fact that he had succeeded in placing at least fifty miles between himself and the stockade at Andersonville had inspired the young soldier with the thought that a fresh attempt might enable him to proceed still farther — even to Sherman's army, which was reported to be marching upon Atlanta.

When Frank saw the old and familiar place where his "shebang" had been erected, he was not surprised to find all his possessions gone. Before he and his friends had escaped through the tunnel there had been a consultation as to what should be done with their belongings. It was finally decided that the blankets which formed their A tent should be entrusted to two of their friends. It was understood that if the attempt should prove to be a failure, the blankets should be returned to their original owners.

Their cooking utensils also were distributed among other friends who were in dire need of such articles and a similar proviso was made.

But when Frank sought to find his friends he was startled when he was informed that

three of them had died during his absence. To two of these his blankets had been loaned. In response to his inquiries he was unable to obtain any information concerning the present location of these very desirable articles.

The prospect was not appealing. It would be impossible for him to obtain any help from the guard, because of the fact that now he was numbered among the prisoners who had attempted to escape. Although it was true that these men now were not often treated with undue harshness, he still was well aware that it would be impossible for him to obtain any favors from the men who were in control of the camp.

Still undismayed by the misfortune which had overtaken him, Frank finally abandoned his search, convinced that it was useless longer to continue it.

Just what he now would be able to do was uncertain. The days and nights still were sultry and the frequent rains rendered worse than useless any "shebang" formed by digging into the hillside for shelter. The hollow place speedily was filled with water, no matter whether the spot was on the hill-

side or in the valley below. Apparently there was no escape from the necessity of sleeping in the open air without protection of any kind from the storm or heat.

However, assuring himself by looking over the great throng and realizing that the majority of his fellow-prisoners were in straits like his own, Frank still was undismayed. His spirit once having been aroused it was difficult for him to modify his enthusiasm.

Once he had escaped outside the stockade, and although he had been captured and returned, the lesson was still clear that another effort might meet with better success.

As Frank abandoned his search and turned back to select as suitable a place as he could now find for his own particular shelter, he was hailed by some one behind him.

Glancing quickly in the direction from which the call had come, he saw John Oatman running toward him.

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute," called John. "You seem to be in a greater hurry than I am. You must know where you want to go and why you want to go there."

"That's right," said Frank with a laugh. "I do know where I want to go, and I'm in a great hurry to get there."

Glancing in surprise at the animated face of his friend, John said, "Have you got a better place?"

"I'm going to find one."

"Where?"

"Outside the stockade."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Only one thing. I'm going to get out of this hole."

"How are you going to do it?" asked John, lowering his voice, for the enthusiasm of his friend was contagious. For his own part John had been greatly cast down since he had been brought back. Perhaps the wounds he had received from the savage bloodhounds had done much to cool his eagerness to escape.

"I do not know that yet, but I know I'm going to get outside, and that's the first thing."

"Will you take me with you?" said John.

"Of course we'll go together," replied Frank, glancing quickly at his friend to see whether or not he was serious in his request.

The change which had come over John was as great as that which Frank had experienced, although they were unlike.

"Did you find any of your belongings?" inquired John.

"Not a thing."

"Well, I've been more fortunate," said John. "I have found two blankets, a half canteen, and a frying-pan that belong to me."

"My, but you're rich!" laughed Frank.

"Yes, and I'm going to be just as generous as I'm rich. You're going to help me put up my 'shebang,' and I'm going to share with you all I've got or have."

"That's good of you," said Frank in a low voice, deeply touched by the generosity of his friend.

"Oh, you need n't give me credit for being too good," said John hastily. "About half the mess I was with has died or scattered since we started for the North. My! but I would n't give up what I had, not even with the dog bites," he added eagerly. "It seemed good to breathe some pure air and get a drink of good water again."

Already the two boys had related their

experiences to each other, and in spite of the fact that John was greatly cast down, there were certain remembrances that plainly would help to arouse his courage once more.

"Come on, Frank," said John eagerly. "I have n't got my work more than half done. You 'll have to help me out if we're to have our A tent in shape before night; and it looks like rain too."

Together the two young soldiers hastened to the spot where John's possessions were located.

The defeat of the Raiders, as well as the execution of their leaders and the fact that the prisoners had their own system of policing the place, now made theft much less common than formerly.

For a time, at least, few men ventured to appropriate blankets or cooking utensils that belonged to others.

To this fact was due the safety of John's belongings, for in his thoughtlessness he had abandoned his task without having requested any of his prison-mates to keep watch upon the place.

For two hours the boys were busy, and at the expiration of that time they pronounced

their task done. It is true their "shebang" still lacked blankets at its ends, but it had been so located that it was sheltered from the prevailing wind and would provide a measure of protection against an ordinary storm.

Several days passed and still the boys were undecided as to the best plan to follow. Both were still determined and Frank's enthusiasm had increased rather than waned. There were rumors of the success which had attended others in their efforts to tunnel under the stockade, while two men were reported to have escaped by crawling beneath the sacks in the wagons in which the provisions of the prisoners had been brought to the camp. Naturally these rumors multiplied, and success or failure had crowned the efforts of the desperate prisoners according to the hopefulness or despair of the narrator.

Rumors of exchange also became more frequent. There were reports that Sherman's army was advancing and that the time for the release for the men at Andersonville was near at hand.

All these, however, had been current ever since the coming of the young sharpshooter,

and produced less effect upon him than they did upon many of the later arrivals at Andersonville.

On the third day after the return of Frank, he was surprised when he was seated in his "shebang" to hear outside the tent the voice of Dennis.

Quickly leaving his shelter Frank rushed forth to find his surmise was correct. It was indeed Dennis O'Hara whose voice he had heard.

"And sure," said Dennis, as he extended his hand, "it's looking fine you are, Frank. You must have had a good time after I left you."

"Not as good a time as I'm going to have," said Frank sturdily.

"Sure, and that's the way to talk," said Dennis. "Of course we'll have a better time. We're not goin' to stay in this hole forever. They tell me there are thirty-five thousand men here now, and that's just that number too many."

"Did you hear anything about exchanging prisoners?" inquired Frank eagerly.

"Sure, I 'heard' enough about it, but I have n't seen it done yet."

“Did you hear anything about Sherman’s army?”

“I did that.”

“What did you hear?”

“I heard that he was only twenty miles away from the place where I was caught. Sure, and if he had known I had been there he would have sent for me. Indade, and I wish he had. I would rather be with Sherman than dwellin’ in the tents of Andersonville.”

“You have n’t told us where you have been nor how you came back,” suggested John, who up to this time had taken no part in the conversation.

“That’s true for you,” said Dennis, “and I’ll tell you about it now.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHAT HAPPENED TO DENNIS

“I HAD me own troubles,” began Dennis, “from the minute you two boys left me.”

“But we did n’t leave you,” interrupted Frank. “You left us.”

“’T is all the same, and I certainly did have me own troubles. If it had not been for the darkies, I don’t believe I ever could have gone as far as I did. I followed the streams, slept in the cabins of the darkies, I was fed by the nagers, and when I found a freight train that was going North, then I thought I was safe. I crawled up between two cars and rode tin miles, but the roadbed was so rough and I was jiggled so hard that me hands pretty soon were all raw and bleeding. Finally, when the old freight stopped again, I jumped off and offered to feed the fire for the engineer and fireman if they would give me a lift. I worked at it until the train stopped again, but I guess I had earned me passage. I slipped out and went back to me old place, and there one of

the Johnnies found me. I tried to make him think that I was one of the force up at Martin's Ferry, but it seems he had worked there himself and he knew all about it, so he caught me in two ways. And now you see me where I am."

"But we're not going to give up," declared Frank positively.

"To be sure we're not," responded Dennis cordially. "If we can make our way fifty miles at one time, perhaps the next time we try it we can go twice as far, and then it will be three times and out. But I'm glad to see you in such good spirits, me boy," he added, turning to the young sharpshooter. "What's made the change?"

"That's what I want to know," joined in John.

"I can't explain," said Frank seriously. "All I know is that since I was brought back, I have been more determined than ever to get away from Andersonville. The lot of the prisoners of war is a hard one."

"Indade, and it is," said Dennis. "There are times whin I would rather be in the hospital."

"I think the fresh air and a taste of clean

food have done as much as anything for me,” explained Frank. “What’s the best thing to do? Shall we try to tunnel or try to steal out with the men that bring our rations, or —”

“We’ll find out directly what is best and see what can be done.”

Meanwhile, unknown to the young prisoners there was a man leading a Union army across the country, whose activities were to have much to do with the welfare of all the boys whom we have met in the course of this story.

General William Tecumseh Sherman, an Ohio boy, born in 1820 and graduated at West Point in 1841, became a captain in the war with Mexico. Afterward, he entered business and when the war between the States broke out he returned to the army.

At the beginning of the war he was not understood either by the people or by the army. Indeed, it was even commonly reported that he was “crazy.”

General Grant, however, who knew him intimately, strongly supported him, just as he, himself, had been supported by President Lincoln. There had been a common report, which finally reached Lincoln, that

General Grant drank too much whiskey. It was also reported that Lincoln wittily replied to the people who had complained of Grant that "if he could find it he would be glad to send a barrel of Grant's whiskey to every one of the Union generals."

The earnest and hearty support which General Grant gave Sherman provided the latter with his opportunity to prove his ability. When at last the war was ended, General Sherman had won a reputation of being one of the greatest of all the generals in the conflict. Sometimes the ablest of the generals were referred to as the "Big Four," which was composed of Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and Thomas.

While General Grant was changing his plans from "hammering" the army of Lee near Richmond, Sherman was ordered to advance with his army from Chattanooga against Dalton and Atlanta, where, as we know, General Joseph E. Johnston was in command of the Confederate forces. This Virginia general was one of the ablest of the Confederate leaders, and, like General Sherman, he was a graduate of West Point. In the Mexican War he was made a colonel,

and soon after the outbreak of the Civil War he became a major-general. By many he is thought to be, next to Robert E. Lee, the ablest of the Confederate generals.

General Johnston, however, had one great disadvantage. While General Lee was a warm friend of Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States, Johnston was warmly disliked by him. It had been reported that if Davis was able to find an excuse for preventing General Johnston from rendering any distinguished service he was happy to do so.

Sherman and Johnston were now pitted against each other and both were exceedingly skillful generals. Indeed, the contest between them became like a fencing match between experts, or like a game of chess between experienced players.

General Johnston held each of his positions until Sherman's forces began to creep around toward his rear, then Johnston cautiously retired to another position and the same tactics were repeated. Neither general was careless, and each was extremely desirous to prevent his enemy from gaining even a slight advantage.

In this manner Johnston was slowly driven back from one position to another, until at last he was forced to cross the Chatahoochee River. Johnston then was compelled to take his position at Atlanta, the strongest of all his defenses. There had been no such terrible loss of life in Sherman's campaign as there had been in Grant's campaign about Richmond. Indeed, Sherman's entire loss was about the same as the loss of the Union soldiers in the fight of twenty minutes at Cold Harbor.

Johnston's plan had been to draw Sherman far from Chattanooga and to a place where he would be able to meet him on equal terms and in a position of his own selection. As the supplies for General Sherman's army were brought from behind him by a single railroad, it became necessary for him to leave strong guards to protect this road whenever he advanced. If he should not do this, then the Confederate cavalry would tear up the railroad and thus prevent supplies from being forwarded and the army would be threatened with starvation.

Every time such a guard was left, Sherman's army, of course, became smaller and

made the two opposing forces more nearly equal in numbers.

Johnston had been playing his game of war so skillfully, and as we know so successfully, that when he took his position at Atlanta he was ready to fight the battle which had been so long postponed, and at once prepared to do so.

But as General Sherman's forces now came rolling like a flood toward the border of the Georgia mountains, the people naturally were alarmed. They did not understand the great skill with which Johnston had been conducting his withdrawal.

Jefferson Davis, who, as we know, disliked Johnston, now found his opportunity and removed him from his position.

General J. B. Hood, who was appointed in Johnston's place, did not possess his predecessor's ability and soon threw away all the chances of success that Johnston had gained. Before the end of the year one of the two great Confederate armies was lost.

Hood had won a name for himself as a hard fighter, and now that he was in command again, he was very desirous of increasing his fame. In July, 1864, he made

three separate and furious attacks on Sherman's army. These were the bloodiest fights that had yet occurred in Georgia.

The Confederates lost all three battles. The result was that early in September, Sherman forced his way around toward the rear of Atlanta, and General Hood with his army was compelled to leave the city. Atlanta was then speedily occupied by the Union forces.

Early the following month, Hood moved his entire army past Atlanta and began to march toward the country from which Sherman had set out. What Hood desired most of all was to force Sherman to follow him and by this action transfer the field of war once more to Tennessee and the north.

But General Sherman was too shrewd to be tricked. He deceived Hood by pretending to pursue him until the Confederates were well started toward Tennessee. Then Sherman rushed back to Atlanta, tearing up the railroad behind him as he proceeded. Already he had sent General Thomas, with nearly half his army, into Tennessee, hoping that Hood would act just as he had done. General Thomas gathered all the Union

troops in Tennessee at Nashville and awaited the coming of Hood. A few miles south of the city a battle was fought, November 30, and though the Confederate army suffered severely, it pushed forward and laid siege to Nashville.

General Thomas waited until his preparations were completed and then vigorously attacked the Confederate army, completely defeating it (December 15, 16). Indeed, so fierce was the pursuit, that the troops of General Hood soon were scattered in every direction. One of the two great armies of the Confederates in this manner disappeared from the conflict.

General Sherman, when he returned to Atlanta, was aware that between him and Virginia there was no organized Confederate army nor was there anywhere the material to be had of which one could be formed. The mistake which General Hood had made had placed almost the entire Confederate army in the South at Sherman's mercy. The Union general had an army of sixty thousand picked veterans, and all the supplies he required were easily obtained because the territory in front of him had not

suffered from the invasion of the Northern armies and was among the richest parts of the South.

By the middle of November, Sherman had burned Atlanta, cut all the telegraph wires, and started his famous march south-east across the country to the sea.

The sea, however, was not the final goal he was seeking. What he really was planning to do was to strike at the back of Lee's army, now far away from Virginia.

Throughout the month, while Sherman and his army were marching through Georgia, very little was known by his friends in the North of his activities or even where he was. The route which Sherman followed was through Milledgeville and Millen, then down through the Peninsula, between the Savannah and Ogeechee Rivers, to Savannah.

In four great columns, which covered a strip of country about sixty miles wide, his victorious army advanced. The country itself was made desolate. Railroads were destroyed, bridges were burned, and the army secured its supplies from the country through which it was marching.

There was hardly a show of resistance to the march. Military experts have declared that even on open ground it is doubtful if any army in the entire war could have successfully made a stand before this powerful army of Sherman.

In December, Sherman's army arrived at the mouth of the Ogeechee River. In a mad rush that lasted only fifteen minutes, Fort McAllister, erected there to guard Savannah, was stormed, and communication was opened with the blockading Union fleet.

Savannah was besieged eight days and then was captured. Its garrison, however, escaped to Charleston, but before it fled it blew up two ironclads which had been built there. Sherman's army remained at Savannah until February of the following year.

It was while General Sherman was engaged in these activities that Noel Curtis was doing his utmost to escape through the Confederate lines and make his way to rejoin his army.

We left him, however, confronting a small band of Confederate soldiers, and it is time for us to return and discover what befell him.

CHAPTER XXIX

NOEL'S CONTEST

“HALT!”

At the sharp command, Noel Curtis abruptly stopped and tried to meet calmly the stern look of inquiry which was cast upon him by the young leader of the little Confederate band.

“Who are yo’?” demanded the leader, who appeared to be not much older than Noel. “What are yo’ doin’ yere? I reckon yo’d better give an account o’ yoreself.”

In one swift glance Noel was aware that escape was to be found only in one direction. Near by was a railroad. Houses were on the opposite side of the street. Men were directly before him, while in the direction from which he had come he saw another squad of infantry approaching. How he had been able to escape them in his journey through the woods, it was impossible for him now to understand.

Again the young officer spoke sharply. “Speak up, stranger, and don’t be afraid o’

yore friends." There was a kindly expression in his eyes that somehow belied the sternness of his voice, and yet Noel Curtis was well aware that the position in which he now found himself was critical.

"I just came through the woods," he stammered at last.

"Yas, suh, but w'are did yo' come from and w'are yo' all goin'?"

Frequently, Noel had thought over what he would say if he should be compelled to answer the very questions which now were asked of him. If he had been questioned by a civilian he was convinced that his replies would have been satisfactory, but the bright young officer was not one likely to be turned easily aside.

"I'm just going up the road a piece," he repeated.

"That's all right, suh," said the officer, "but yo' must tell us who yo' are and w'are yo're goin'."

"I don't mind telling you," said Noel, "but I don't want to say it before all of these men. If you'll come out on the road here I'll be glad to tell you all I know."

For a moment the young Confederate

stared blankly at Noel, and then, laughing heartily, turned and ordered his men to break ranks. Turning quickly to Noel, he said, "Now, go on, my lad, and tell me yore story. I hope yo' will not think we're unduly inquisitive, but with Sherman less than ten miles away we're lookin' out right sha'p fo' spies, and fo' men who might give information to the enemy."

"I'm no spy," said Noel sharply.

"I have yore word fo' that," replied the officer dryly. "Now, then, be quick with yore story and tell me who yo' are, what yo're doin' yere, and w'are yo're goin'."

"I've told you already," said Noel somewhat tartly. "I've just come through the woods and I'm on my way to —"

"To w'are?" said the officer, as Noel hesitated.

"To be honest with you," said Noel, "I want to get work at some of the shops." He was unaware that he was following closely in the footsteps of Dennis, who had learned of the repair shops at Martin's Ferry. "I don't know just where I can get work, but they tell me there's plenty to be had somewhere up here at some of the shops."

I must find work and get something to do pretty soon."

"Do yo' know what I think?"

"No, sir, I can't say that I do."

"You don't belong in these pa'ts. Folks down yere don't use the Yankee talk. They don't say 'pretty soon.' They say 'right soon,' jest as ev'ry white man ought toe."

Noel was aware that the crisis had come. He glanced at the soldiers whom the young officer had dispersed, and saw that, although they were no longer in line, they had not departed far from the place. They were standing in groups of two or three, talking together, or, having cast themselves upon the ground, were obtaining rest, which it was apparent all of them needed.

That the man before him was well armed, Noel was fully convinced. He, however, had no means by which he could defend himself and in a contest there was slight question as to what the outcome speedily would be.

Aware of his desperate plight, Noel suddenly threw himself upon the young officer and bore him to the ground. He made a desperate attempt to secure the revolver

which was in the belt of his enemy, but in a moment he was compelled to exert his strength to the utmost to prevent his opponent from overpowering him.

If only he could free himself now, Noel thought he might be able to escape by running swiftly to the rear of the little station and then dodging among the buildings until he could gain the highway beyond. There was also a bend in the railway track near by, as he had noticed in his quick survey of the region. The sight had instantly suggested a possibility of flight in that direction, and the young sharpshooter was not without hope that he might be able to gain one or the other of these two means of departure.

At present, however, he was not only unable to hold down his enemy, but he was compelled to do his utmost to prevent himself from suffering the fate which he had hoped to visit upon the other.

For two minutes the desperate struggle continued, neither of the young men apparently able to secure a decided advantage over the other. By this time, however, the Confederate soldiers near by became aware of what was occurring, and with a shout



SUDDENLY THREW HIMSELF UPON THE YOUNG OFFICER

they started swiftly to the aid of their young leader.

Noel was aware of their coming even before he saw them. Escape now was impossible. He was like a man who had seized the handles of a galvanic battery. Try as he might, he was unable to let go.

In a brief time the soldiers were upon him, and Noel would have fared badly at their hands had not the young officer, in spite of the marks of his contest, quickly spoken in his behalf.

"Don't touch him. Leave him to me," he said sharply.

From his appearance Noel was inclined to believe that the plan of the young soldier was to confine the conflict to themselves. Whatever may have been in the mind of his enemy, however, such a course was practically impossible.

"That's all right," said Noel quickly. "I surrender."

"That's mighty good of yo'," laughed the young Confederate. "That's mighty kind of yo'. Now, then, will yo' all answer my questions?" he added as he turned abruptly upon Noel.

"What are your questions?" Noel was aware that it was dangerous for him to trifle longer, but he was not without hope that he might be able to prolong the conversation and that some way of escape still might present itself.

"Who are yo'?"

"Do you want my name?"

"I'm not pa'ticular about yore name. Are yo' a spy?"

"No, sir."

"Yo're a Yank soldier."

"I acknowledge it," said Noel. "I'm proud of the fact."

"Strange how little it takes to make some folks puffed up. What are yo' all doin' down yere without yore uniform on?"

The question was not unexpected, and for a moment Noel was silent. Escape now was impossible. The utmost that he could hope to obtain was some consideration from his captors.

Every one of the men appeared to be interested, and although they had surrounded him, the glances that were given him indicated more curiosity than malice.

Now that he was convinced of his help-

lessness, Noel was inclined to believe that he would receive more consideration by frankly explaining why it was that he was in the rear of the Confederate lines.

"I belong to the Army of the Potomac," he said.

"And yet yo're down yere in civilian's clothing."

"So I am," acknowledged Noel. "I'm wondering if you have heard of some of the Yankee soldiers running away with a part of a train up at Hamlet?"

"We suhtainly have!"

The men now were pressing more closely upon the prisoner and their interest was apparent.

"Well, I was one of the men," said Noel. "If you know the story, I don't need to tell you any more about it. I'm in your hands and you can do with me as you like."

"Yo' know what happened to some of the Yanks in that scrape, don't yo'?"

"No."

"Well, some were hanged, some were shot, and all the rest o' them are in prison."

"Is that the truth?" demanded Noel, looking steadily into the eyes of his captor.

"Yas, suh, it suhtainly is. I know, for my brother was one of the men that caught the Yanks in the old barn up near Charlie Jamison's place."

"I don't know anything about that," said Noel. "My brother was one of the men that must have been taken."

"Do yo' all know w'are he is now?"

Manifestly, the young officer was in no great haste and his interest in the interview was so deep that the conversation was prolonged.

"No, I don't," said Noel. "I wish I did."

"Well, yo' all know what is likely to happen to yo'. If I could follow my own feelin's, I'd be mighty glad, Yank, to treat yo' in a different way. I think I know a brave man wherever I see him. And you suhtainly have muscles in yore right arm. I'm goin' to treat yo' like I'd like toe be treated if I was in the same trouble, though yo' understand, Yank, that I should like toe string up old Sherman and hang him on the first tree by th' roadside." As he spoke, the young officer's eyes flashed and his cheeks flushed under the coating of soil

which he had received in his recent struggle with Noel.

"We'll take yo' all along with us," he continued, "and let some of the older and wiser men say what ought toe be done with yo'."

Turning to his followers, he ordered them to fall in, and Noel was compelled to advance by the side of the young leader.

Silently the company proceeded until night fell, and then they halted at another little village. Here, although Noel was strictly guarded, he was treated not unkindly by his captors, and the young officer seemed to be eager to show him special attention.

"Do yo' know," he was explaining, "that I never order my men toe fall in without thinkin' of old General Semm. We call him 'general,' but he's only a sergeant, and not much of that. He was givin' some men a guard drill, but he did n't know the manual, or leastwise not enough o' it to know what the orders were, suh. I came up to the place where he had his squad and I saw one big fat fellow in the line. He had tied a piece o' tar rope to his belt to make it go around his

waist. Just then General Semm called out, 'Now, boys, git into two ranks like 'tater ridges, fo' I is goin' toe bring yo' all intoe fo's.' After he had got his men into two ranks, he gave the order to 'right dress,' but somehow the line did n't suit him. This big fellow with the tar rope tied to his belt seemed to give him the most trouble of all. It seemed like his name was Eph. Marching straight down the line and taking his stand in front of him, the general said, 'Eph, Eph, stick in yore stomach, thar!' Eph tried to obey, but he had his difficulties. When his feet were in line his stomach was too far over, but when his stomach was in line his feet were too far to the rear. Finally, the general took out his sword and drawing a straight mark on the ground in front of him, said, 'Gol ding it, if yo' can't right dress, come right up to that thar scratch.' The men succeeded in obeying his order, and then he commenced to drill them in the manual. Still Eph gave him the most trouble. The general finally yelled at him, 'Eph, Eph, I've done tole yo' fo' times toe bring yore gun toe a tote and yo' ain't done it. I'm afraid, Eph, yo' must be a plum

fool.' Then, turning to a sergeant, he said, 'Put this yere Eph on guard down by th' swamp. I don't want toe see him no mo'.' But all this has nothing to do with what we're goin' toe do with yo'."

CHAPTER XXX

CONCLUSION

THE days slowly passed at Andersonville and the condition of the wretched prisoners steadily became harder to bear. Men, weakened by their privations, or disabled before they had been consigned to the place, were unable to endure the hardships that existed where such a mass of men were crowded together. The numbers of the dead every morning apparently were greater than on the preceding day. Frail, wasted, emaciated bodies were to be seen on every side. That which was hardest to bear, however, was the expression of utter despair that was seen on many a face. Stronger than the diseases from which the men were suffering was the indescribable expression of homesickness seen on many faces. Doubtless many a man died at Andersonville who would have lived had he once more been able to see his home, his family, and his friends. Starvation, lack of protection from the storms and the heat,

insufficient food, and lack of sanitation combined in their deadly work.

The much-talked-of plan of escape, which our three friends had boldly declared they would speedily form, did not materialize until Dennis, convinced that something must be done to hold the new courage of Frank and John, suggested that they should begin another tunnel.

This was looked upon by the prisoners as being the easiest as well as the most feasible plan of getting outside the stockade. Still, no sharp outlook was kept upon the prisoners, and, though men frequently were shot for crossing the dead line, and it was well known that guards were stationed all about the stockade, these were not considered insuperable barriers. At all events, Sergeant Dennis was persuaded that activity, though it produced no tangible results, was better for his friends and himself than the enforced idleness of the camp. There were so many things to rob a man of his hope that there would be an advantage in providing something that would keep the thoughts of his friends upon other matters, at least for a time.

Not many yards of the new tunnel had been excavated, however, before a wild rumor spread swiftly through the prison. John was the first to report, and in his eagerness he said to Frank and Dennis, "There's going to be an exchange of prisoners!"

"So I have heard for a century or more," said Frank.

There had been times when such a report would have strongly aroused him, but hope had been deferred so many times that his heart was sick.

The rumor brought by John, however, increased in strength throughout the day. When it was to be or how the exchange was to be made was not explained. So persistent, however, was the report, that at last Dennis, who by his very boldness had secured more privileges than most of the men, went to the adjutant and made inquiries.

Upon his return he reported that there was now, indeed, some foundation for the rumor. The adjutant had acknowledged that arrangements were being made for the exchange of fifteen hundred men.

Dennis, however, was still insistent upon continuing the labor in the new tunnel, but

on the following day the task was abandoned.

At that time there came a summons for the prisoners to be lined up, and even Frank was persuaded that the vague report of exchanges perhaps had become true at last. The men were to be sent by train and were to leave Andersonville on parole.

When at last the order was given for the roll to be called and the men who should be named were to step forward, a silence tense and almost breathless settled over the long lines.

As fast as the names were called, the men advanced, an expression of happiness appearing on every face, perhaps more marked because of the anxiety of those whose names as yet had not been called.

The three friends whose fortunes we have followed in this story were standing together. Every one was intently gazing with an expression of agony at the officer, who slowly and in his loudest tones was calling the names from the roll which he held in his hand.

At last the officer called Frank's name. For a moment the young prisoner staggered

as if he was about to fall. He was quickly lifted in the arms of Dennis, however, and then advanced alone. Eagerly grasping a pen he signed the parole and then turned for a moment to glance back at his two companions. Even in the midst of their own terrible anxiety, Frank was able to see the expression of sympathy with which both of them were regarding him.

"Move on! Move on!" called the officer sharply, and Frank was obliged to join the line that was slowly moving toward the gate.

As he proceeded, once more he glanced back at the hillside of the camp. He was again sharply impressed by the immense mosaic of human faces. It was his last look at Andersonville Prison.

Not long after he had been led through the gate he was joined by his two recent companions. When night fell the paroled prisoners were conducted to a long train of freight cars. Inside these cars the men were packed until every car was filled to its utmost capacity. Then, in their eagerness, some of the prisoners climbed to the tops of the cars, and when at last the train slowly started it presented a weird and pathetic

sight. A chilly wind was blowing at the time, and the men who were on the tops of the cars were even in a worse condition than those who were crowded within them.

All through the night the slow train rumbled steadily on its way toward the North. When at last daylight returned, the bodies of those who had died the preceding night were taken from the cars and left to be buried along the way. In spite of the sadness of the sight, and of the thought that many had started on the long ride toward the promised land, only to fall before they gained the end of their journey, the remaining prisoners were not much like those who had departed from Andersonville the preceding evening.

The disappointment of the men, when at last the first stage of their long journey was ended, to learn that they were to be left, though only for a time, at the prison at Florence, was intense. Some of the men broke down and cried like children; others were loud in their abuse of General Sherman for not coming with his army to their relief.

A different feeling, however, came to Frank and Dennis when they were marched

through the gate of their new prison. Within, were many Union soldiers, some of whom had been confined there for a long time, while others had only recently come. Many of the inmates were standing in lines watching the newcomers, fearful and yet expecting to find among them friends or comrades they had known in weeks long since passed.

As Frank and his companions advanced a few yards inside the stockade, all three stopped when a loud cry was heard.

“Frank! Frank Curtis!” Glancing quickly in the direction from which the unexpected hail had come, Frank beheld his brother Noel running swiftly toward him. In a moment the two boys had thrown their arms around each other’s neck, and even those who had been long seasoned to the sights of sorrow were looking at the two boys with an expression that could not be misunderstood.

As soon as the greetings had been given, each of the twin brothers was giving the story of his experiences since last they had been together, while Dennis and John were almost as deeply interested as their friends.

“I did n’t know,” explained Noel, “when

I was taken but that I should be shot or hanged as Captain Jack and some of our men were. I guess it was because I was the only one, and perhaps they did n't altogether believe my story, that they finally decided to send me to the prison here at Florence. I have been here so long now that I had almost given up hope of ever seeing you again."

The stop at Florence, however, was not to be prolonged. When ten days had elapsed the hearts of the men were made glad by an order that they were to be carried forward to Charleston, where they would be transferred and taken to Baltimore, whence they would be sent North.

Again every prisoner signed a parole. Some of the men, however, were shot on the journey to Charleston because they tried to escape when the train halted at the little hamlets on their way.

"It's hard," said one of the friends of Frank, who was thus shot by a guard — "It's hard to be laid out just before I was set free."

They were the last words uttered by the unfortunate man, who, in the joy of the

exchange from Andersonville, had become almost demented.

At Charleston there was another delay of three days. A dense fog had settled over the harbor, which prevented the removal of the men to the flag-of-truce boat. Some of the wretched men were stretched out on the sidewalk, being unable to move. Indeed, many of them breathed their last when they were almost within sight of freedom.

In spite of the bitterness of the war, which was intense at this time, some of the poor men were fed by the women and children of Charleston, who provided them with soup and gruel.

Finally, the men stood together on the wharf, ready to embark on the flag-of-truce boat. When the boat at last set sail down the harbor, and the sight of the old flag was seen when the receiving ship was reached, expressions of gratitude that were spoken tremulously were heard on every side. "Thank God! Thank God!" The men had broken with their past. Memories that would endure as long as they lived still remained. Many a soldier survived the famine and the suffering only to bear the

marks of his prison experiences throughout his life.

After the receiving ship arrived at Annapolis, the men who were able to endure the journey North were selected and consigned to trains which were to carry them away.

In spite of their gaunt faces and emaciated forms, all four of our friends insisted that they were able to bear the journey, and, permission being finally secured for them to depart, the four boys speedily were northward bound.

Every passing hour seemed to revive their strength and restore their hope. No longer were they fed on corn meal or exposed to the storms and heat.

As the train proceeded still farther northward, people at the stations were waiting and ready with food which they had prepared to feed the famished men. Indeed, Dennis declared that if such conditions did not cease soon, there would be no need of sending the prisoners home to recuperate. His companions, however, did not share his feeling, and when at last the two young sharpshooters were again in their home on the

banks of the St. Lawrence River, not many days had passed before they heard by letter that John Oatman had fallen a victim to a fever.

Finally there came a day when the reports of the surrender of General Lee were received in the North country. There were celebrations and noisy rejoicings by the assemblies of the country people.

Frank and Noel were looked upon by the people at home as heroes in the great struggle which thus had been brought to an end.

"We're not heroes," declared Noel modestly. "We're like hundreds and thousands of other men. The part we took was small, but we tried to do what little we did as well as we knew how."

"And that's the reason why we won," declared an enthusiastic neighbor. "Now that the war is ended, I hope the bitter feeling will die away, but there is one thing for which I confess I'm glad."

"And what is that?" demanded Noel.

"That Major Wirz was tried and executed."

THE END

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